

A HISTORY
OF
THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
WITH THIRTY-FIVE STORIES

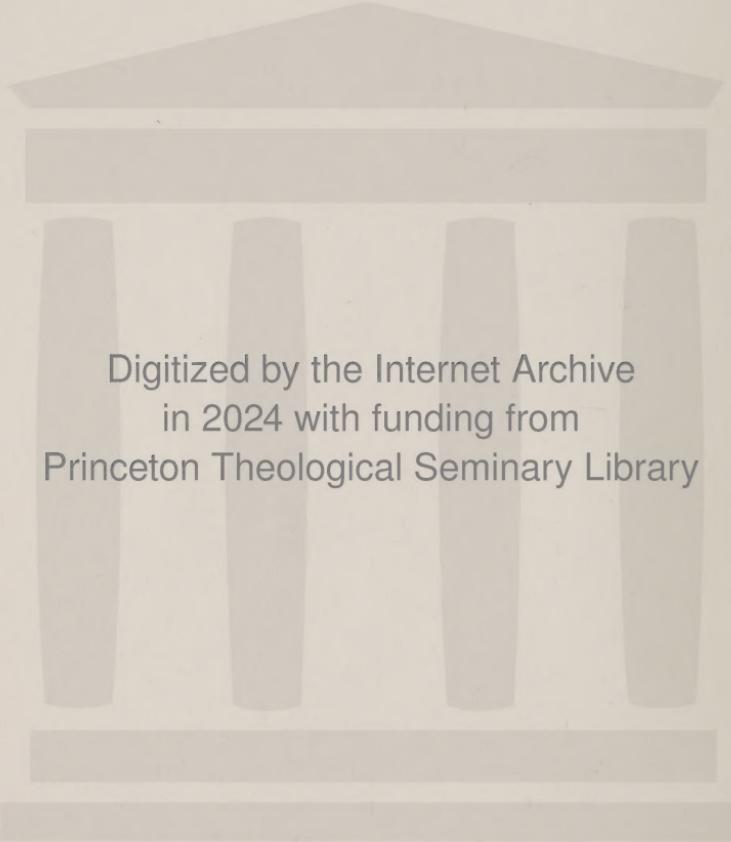
BY
HAGOP NERSOYAN

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COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
NEW YORK



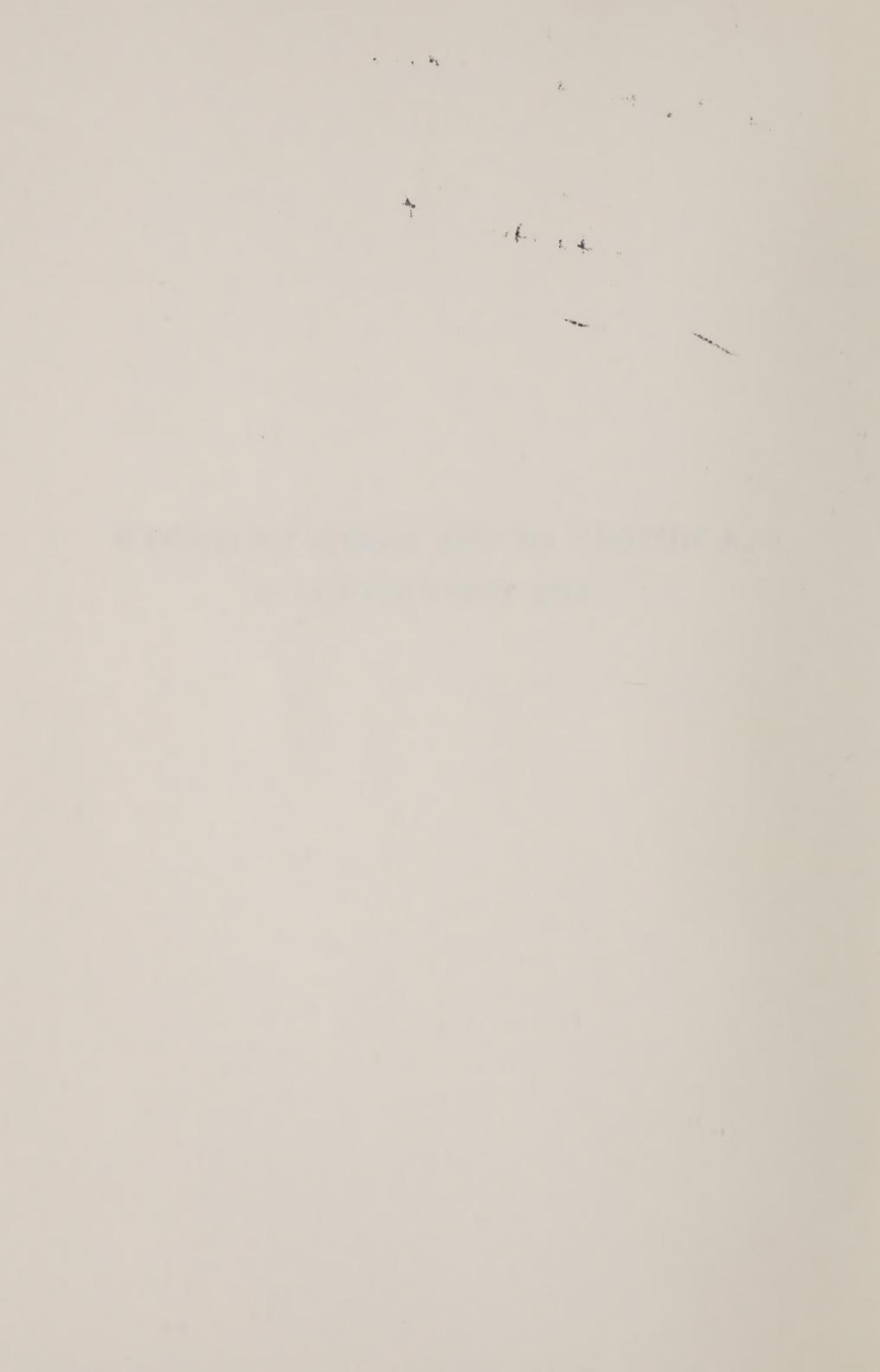
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HAGOP NERSOYAN

COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
NEW YORK

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at Holy Etchmiadzin

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began writing this book in 1952 when I was director of the church Sunday schools of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Archbishop Tiran was then the Primate. After a period of interruption, the Council for Religious Education requested that the book be completed. A mimeographed text, consisting of the present thirty-five stories, has been in use in our various church schools since 1959.

A printed book is always the result of a collective effort, and I wish to extend my thanks to all those—whether living or dead, whether Armenian or non-Armenian—who contributed something to the production of the present volume. Anyone familiar with the literature of Armenian church history will know at once that Mal'akia Ormanian's *Azgapatoum* has been used extensively. His dates have sometimes been revised on the basis of El'ishé Dourian's *Azgayin Patmouhyoun*. Various other works have been used or consulted including, specifically for Story XXXV, Rev. Arten Ashjian's *Vijacatsouys*, a history of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, written in 1949. Three friends well versed in Armenian history have been consulted on the choice of the heroes of our stories.

The completion and publication of this work have been authorized by Archbishop Sion, the present Primate of the Diocese and president of the Diocesan Council. The director of the Armenian church schools and chairman of the C.R.E. is the Very Rev. Muron Gurjikian, whose cooperation is appreciated. Mr. Dadour Dadourian must be mentioned among lay friends for his early interest in the writing of such a book. Special acknowledg-

ments are also due to Father Vartan Megherian, former vicar general and chairman of the C.R.E., to Yeretskin Yefkin Megherian, superintendent of the Sunday School of the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs, and to Mr. H. K. Shalian, of the Delphic Press, for their personal interest in the production of this volume. I am especially indebted to my wife for her assistance at every stage of the work, and for the preparation of the index.

My own share of work in the production of this volume I would like to dedicate to the memory of my father, the late priest Nersess Tavoukjian, the onetime president of the Armenian Council for Self-defense in Antep, Turkey. His story is the story of the people whom he served until a miscalculated attempt at making him disregard justice cut short the thread of his life. It is from him and of course from my mother Annitza that I began to learn some of the stories here retold.

H. N.

Forest Hills, New York

January, 1963

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The overriding purpose of this book is to cause the reader to relive some moments from the past of the Armenian people. The stories in particular are meant to serve that purpose, and it is hoped that they will entertain and/or instruct everyone, including young ladies and young men in their early teens.

An illustrated edition of this work is available, containing the stories only. The present edition containing introductions to the stories is for those who seek more instruction than entertainment; it is also for the teachers of our church Sunday schools. Worksheets designed to facilitate the teaching of this material can be obtained.

The Introductions will help the reader place each story in its historical context. If the reader is a teacher he may use the clues given in them to enlarge his perspective by consulting other reference books. There is of course no limit to the amount of knowledge a teacher may desire to have before facing his class, but the present text should provide enough information to enable him to tell the story effectively, with a satisfactory measure of self-confidence.

The presentation of each story in this work is only one manner of telling it. When it is used for purposes of instruction, the story must not be read to the class, but related by the instructor in his own words. The instructor may be satisfied with his own command of the story if, i) he knows the facts well enough to be able to create vivid scenes using such details as the garments worn by, or the physical appearance of, important figures, and, ii) he is emotionally involved to the point of living the excite-

ment of a discovery, the fury of a war, the inner peace of a saint, the misery of a villain, or the joy of self-sacrifice for the common good. As to the moral of the story, it should not be told explicitly. If there *is* a moral, the instructor may keep it in the back of his mind while leaving his hearers free to arrive at conclusions of their own.

Almost no physical description given in this book is imagined. On the other hand, many—but by no means all—of the dialogues and some scenes, such as the one with which Story VII opens, are not to be found in the original sources. Yet the dialogues and scenes thus added are, it goes without saying, highly probable within the situation of the period.

A story or a historical detail is particularly interesting when we see an affinity between ourselves and the people about whom we are reading. We are interested in the destiny of someone else when he is grappling with a difficulty that is our own difficulty, and one way of bringing out the present relevance of past historical occurrences is to tell them as dramatically as possible, without distorting history in the process. “What was the situation? How did a particular person meet that situation in his determination to change it for the better?” These are the questions that each story must ask and answer.

A word must be said about our transliteration. We have based it generally on the pronunciation of “Eastern Armenian.” We have, conservatively, followed our forefathers in using *c* to replace the fifteenth letter of the Armenian alphabet. But the principle of absolute consistency has been abandoned in order to make it somewhat easier, to persons born in this country, to pronounce Armenian names more or less faithfully. Again, it seemed to the author that *l'* represents our eighteenth letter better than *gh*. At any rate the problem is partly a matter of taste and convention, and a transliteration based on “Western Armenian” is given in the index. The author is acutely aware of such discrepancies as *Gregory of Narec* and *Grigor III*, or *Georg* and *Kevork, Moses* (instead of *Movsess*) etc., and while conceding

that they could have been avoided, rests secure in the knowledge that they only reflect the general confusion. The last consonants of many names have been doubled in order to invite the reader to place the accent on the last syllable.

We have said that the overriding purpose of this book is to cause the reader to relive some moments of the past. "Why," it may be asked, "should we relive the past at all?" We shall let Nicolas Berdyaev, a modern thinker of considerable renown, answer that question. He does so on page 73 of his book, *The Meaning of History*, translated by George Reavey:

"The historical memory is the greatest manifestation of the eternal spirit in our temporal reality. It upholds the historical connection of the times. It is the very foundation of history. Without it history would not exist; for even if history did fulfil itself, the cleavage between the past, the present and the future would be so hopeless as to render all apprehension of history impossible. All historical knowledge is but a remembrance, one or another form of the triumph of memory over the spirit of corruption. By means of memory we resurrect the remote past which had seemingly perished or been engulfed in some dark abyss. Memory is therefore the eternal ontological basis of all history. It conserves the paternal principle, our relationship with our fathers; for the latter is synonymous with that between the past, present and future. To forget our descent completely would be to forget the past. And this would be equivalent to a state of insanity in which mankind would live only upon the rags of time in its torn instants without any co-ordinating principle."

A HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
With Thirty-five Stories

Introduction to Story I

It is necessary while acquainting ourselves with the history of our people, that we have a fairly accurate idea of the part of the world where this history unfolded itself. To that purpose the reader who may have some difficulty in locating a large map of historic Armenia can use any modern map, provided it shows the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea (known in ancient times as the Euxine Pontus) and the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. If used in a classroom, no student will have any great difficulty in finding places on such a map where the frontiers of historic Armenia can roughly be traced as follows:

Find the town of Tbilisi or Tiflis, the capital of the Georgian S.S. R. The river Kur or Kura passes through Tiflis. This river constitutes most of the *northern* frontier of historic Armenia. Now to determine the *northwestern* frontier trace an irregular line from Batumi on the Black Sea, to the town of Silifke, passing through Malatya, in Turkey. "Silifke" is a corruption of "Seleucia" and this town is to be found at a distance of about 120 miles west of the northeastern tip of the Mediterranean Sea.

The eastern shores of the Mediterranean from Silifke to about Tyre (below Beirut, Lebanon) constituted the *western* frontier of historic Armenia. As to the *southern* frontier, it could be indicated by an irregular line from Tyre to a point between Zenjan and Kazvin, which are important villages in northern Iran, above the town of Hamadan. The *eastern* frontier of historic Armenia would be a line from the mouth of the river Kura mentioned above, to the point between Zenjan and Kazvin. All the geographical names to be mentioned in this book (save those of Cilicia) will be somewhere within the area determined in these two paragraphs. The modern names of ancient localities will be given whenever possible.

Armenia never exceeded in size the area given above. In fact, it reached this size in the first century B.C., during the reign of Tigran

the Great. Thereafter it kept diminishing in size through the centuries. In the eighteenth century it was divided among khans or warlords, each of whom was practically a sovereign in his small patch of land. Today Armenia, a Soviet republic, has an area of 3,863 square miles and is surrounded by the Georgian S.S.R., the Azerbaijani S.S.R., Iran and Turkey.

Our great historian, Moses of Khoren, traces the origin of the Armenian people to Hayc who, he says, was a descendant of Japheth, the second or third son of Noah. Moses of Khoren traces the origin of his people to a biblical figure because this was, in his time, an effort at historical accuracy. If, he reasoned, we are all children of Adam, then our ancestor must be a descendant of Adam, through Noah. This view had the further advantage of giving to the Armenian people a definite place in the economy of God. In fact, the source of Moses of Khoren's conjecture is the Bible itself where Ashkenaz, a descendant of Japheth, is associated with Ararat (cf. Genesis 10:2,3 and Jeremiah 51:27).

Few people, if any, would be prepared to accept today Moses of Khoren's views, yet he does not seem to have been altogether wrong in his conjecture, within the framework of his own historical thinking. Japheth is the reputed ancestor of peoples of Indo-European stock, inhabiting Western Asia and the islands of the Mediterranean. On the other hand a language known as Japhetite was spoken by the ancient Khaldians whose state became a formidable enemy of the Assyrians. There were Armenians in the Khaldian state of *Urartu*. The Armenian people, as it came to be constituted in later centuries, was mainly a mixture of the inhabitants of Urartu and *Indo-European* Armenians. The place of origin of the Indo-Europeans is a matter of dispute. They invaded Europe and Western Asia during the second millennium before Christ, probably having discovered a new military tactic. The Indo-European Armenians seem to have mixed with the earlier inhabitants of Armenia during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. An inscription at Behistun, a village in western Iran, refers to the country of the Armenians as *Armina*. This inscription is by the emperor Darius Hystaspes. Its date is 521 B.C.

The beginnings of our people are and will continue to be a matter of discussion among Armenian and European scholars as new clues are unearthed shedding light thereon. The most important clues are certain words that we still use. One Hittite inscription — earlier than

that of Behistun — seems to refer to a land called "Hayasa", a word close to "Hayastan", as "Urartu" is close to "Ararat". Thus our ties with the ancient Mesopotamian civilization are established.

Greek documents indicate our connections with the peoples of Europe. According to the geographer and historian Strabo, who lived from about 63 B.C. to 24 A.D., the word Armenian comes from the name of a Thessalian hero, Armenus. This hero is said to have joined the Argonauts in search of the golden fleece. The land of the legendary golden fleece is Colchis, situated on the eastern shores of the Euxine Pontus, off the northern frontiers of historic Armenia. Strabo tells us that the Armenians used to dress exactly like the Thessalian Greeks, while Herodotus, another Greek historian who lived five hundred years before Strabo, reports that the Armenians' garments were like those of the Phrygians.

If Armenia has been a coveted piece of land, this is not, to be sure, because of its geographical position alone. Its natural resources could not be ignored. Horses, for example, were an extremely important commodity in times both of war and of peace. They were abundant in Armenia. The above-mentioned Greek historian Strabo praises their sturdiness and ability to climb mountains. Cattle were also plentiful. The fertility of the land is proverbial. (There is evidence that rainfall was heavier in Armenia in ancient times.) Lucullus is said to have transplanted the cherry- and apricot-tree from Armenia. The country was also rich in minerals, as is to be seen in the industrial—along with the agricultural—possibilities that are being utilized in Soviet Armenia today. Among the various rock formations of Armenia the tufa is famous.

We said above that in ancient times the Khaldians became the sworn enemies of the Assyrians and that Armenians lived on Khaldian territory. The battle between Hayc Nahapet (or Patriarch) and Bel or Belus, a Babylonian or Assyrian chieftain is, then, a distant echo of the bloody hostilities between the Armenians and the Assyrians. So is the story of Shamiram (or Semiramis) and Ara the Fair, for Shamiram was an Assyrian princess whose historical existence is doubtful, and Ara the Fair was an Armenian prince. Yet the real value of these stories is in their moral connotations. Hayc stands for the love of freedom. Ara stands for the sanctity of the human individual and of the family.

OUR FOREFATHERS

(THE STORIES OF HAYC* NAHAPET AND ARA THE FAIR)

The father of the Armenian people is a brave and handsome man. His name was Hayc. He had curly hair, bright and penetrating eyes, and was famous for the strength both of his body and of his character.

Hayc lived hundreds of years before Jesus Christ, when the tower of Babylon was being built. We know from the Bible that this tower was being built on the shores of the river Euphrates as an act of rebellion against the Lord God. The writer of that story tells us that people were building the high tower in order to find refuge on top of it in case God would punish their wickedness by sending a great flood, as he had done once before, in Noah's time.

Among the builders of the tower of Babylon was a tyrant. His name was Bel. He himself did not contribute to the actual building of the tower. Being a strong chieftain, he used to watch the workers and engineers from afar, leaning on his long spear and doing nothing. He would say to himself: "After we have this tower built, God will not be able to punish us any more, and I, even I, will be the king and only ruler of the people of Babylonia. They will serve *me*".

But Hayc, our forefather, who also lived in Babylon, would rather obey his conscience than this man called Bel. He wanted to be free and to worship freely according to his religion. He also liked peace. So he gathered his children, grandchildren and other followers and set out for another part of the world. They were all travelling in the direction of cold and mountainous lands.

*Also spelled Hayk or Hayg

One such land was to be called *Hayastan* or Armenia. They built on the way a small town which they called *Hay-cashenn* and began to live there for a time in peace and freedom.

Bel had become much stronger in the meantime. He could never forgive Hayc for leaving him and going away. He was furious. He wanted, in fact, to use Hayc's power against his own enemies. He wanted him to be his servant. Bel sent after him summoning him to come back. He said to his messengers: "Go and tell the brave Hayc to come back and live in my warm and fruitful country. Life in my kingdom is easy. He will not have to work hard. I will make him a commander in my great army and he can have all the pleasures he wants. But if he refuses to come back of his own will, then tell him that I, Bel, will descend upon him with all the might of my soldiers and chariots, and then he will *have* to come back, either alive or dead." But the fearless Hayc would not give up his independence. He sent Bel's messengers back. "Go tell your Master," he said, "that Hayc and his people prefer freedom in a cold climate to slavery in a warm land."

This proud answer made Bel even more furious. War was now inevitable. Bel decided to come in person to capture Hayc. Hayc heard the news and gathered his followers and spoke to them saying: "We must not be slaves to Bel. We will wage war against him, because there is nothing else we can do. We do not want his land and we are not attacking him; but he wants our land and he is attacking us. I am sure we shall defeat him and his soldiers; but if we must die, then let us die as free men!"

The battle was very fierce. Arrows, glittering in the sun, were flying in all directions. Finally from among his armoured men Bel came forward like a mad tiger and challenged Hayc with his booming voice, and then there was silence. The brave forefather of the Armenian people was alert. He knew this was going to happen. He lifted his bow which no one else could bend; stretched his arm and held it steady. He

pulled the string made of cowhide, aimed the arrow at Bel, and let go. Then a heavy moan was heard and its many echoes bounced on and off the flanks of the mountains, far away. Bel fell and the shield with which he was to defend himself clanged against the rocks.

The threat to the freedom of Hayc and his children and grandchildren and followers was removed.

* * *

Hayc's oldest son was Armenac. It is he who, with his tribe, came to dwell in the cold and mountainous country that was to be known as Armenia. The two most outstanding mountains of this land are *Ararat* and *Aragadz*.

Ararat is one of the most beautiful mountains of the world. Those who have seen it say that it takes on different colors during the day and sometimes nothing but its snowy peaks are seen from a distance, above clouds. In fact it is 16,970 feet high and is covered with snow all the time. Its two prominent peaks are called *Medz* (great) *Massis* and *Pokr* (little) *Massis*. Mount Ararat has watched the Armenian people grow. It has seen the good and bad days of the Armenian people and is, therefore, our most beloved mountain. There are many poems written about it of which the following is a well-known example:

Over old Mount Ararat
The centuries, like an instant,
Have passed.

The shafts of many lightnings
Have touched its diamond peak,
And passed.

Bewitched masses of men
Have gazed at its sides and height,
And passed.

Your turn has now arrived
Its majestic front to behold,
And pass . . .

According to the Bible, Noah's Ark rested upon the peak of Ararat after the Flood.

Aragadz is a little lower than Ararat. It is also very beautiful. It is famous for its four peaks. The melting snows of these four peaks form a lake in their center, some 12,000 feet above sea level.

In these majestic surroundings grew up the descendants of Hayc: Armenac, Aramayiss, Amassia, Gel'am, Harma and Aram. The most famous of these is Aram who, on account of his conquests is known as the second forefather of the Armenians. He defeated Prince Nukar of the Medes, Prince Parsham of the Assyrians and Prince Bayabiss of the Cappadocians. The son of Aram was Ara the Fair.

* * *

Ara was a very handsome prince. He was courageous like his father Aram and his heart was pure like the spotless peaks of the mountains of Armenia.

Armenia's neighboring country was, at that time, Assyria which was a vast empire. Ninos was the king of Assyria and Shamiram was his queen. Shamiram was very beautiful. She liked Ara much more than her husband. The thoughts and feelings she had in her mind and heart were not always right. Although Ninos loved her very much, she wanted him to die. One day Ninos wanted to do his wife a great favor. "Tomorrow," he said to her, "you wear the crown from sunrise to sunset and be the only ruler of the empire for one day." This was a great favor because the rulers of Assyria could do exactly as they pleased. No one could stand in their way. That night Shamiram made all her wicked plans. On the next day at sunrise she put the crown on her head and before the sun was down she had her husband put to death.

"At last!" Shamiram grinned to herself, "now I am free and I can marry Ara, the handsome prince of the Armenians." Shamiram knew that Ara was married, but this did not prevent her from sending him much gold, precious stones and other valuable gifts. She sent them with an engraved brick on which

she said: "These presents, O handsome prince of the people of Armenia, are only a small part of what I am willing to give you. If you become my husband I will also give you my vast and wealthy empire. You will rule me and my people and we will all obey you."

Ara loved and respected Nward, his wife. When he received the letter of the mighty and beautiful queen of Assyria, he fell into a daze. He could not believe his eyes. Then he called his wife and showed the letter to her. It was clear that he would refuse every offer that Shamiram made to him, no matter how attractive.

Shamiram decided to take Ara by force. She sent her powerful army to the frontiers of Armenia, carefully telling her officers to bring Ara to her, alive. But her orders could not be carried out. Ara did not want to be caught alive. In his valiant fight for the defense of his country, family and honor, Ara the Fair fell on the field of battle which was at the foot of Mount Ararat. The news of Ara's death filled the Armenians with sorrow and wrath. But Shamiram dressed up one of her commanders as Ara so as to have the Armenians believe that their handsome prince was not really dead.

The Armenians have always liked their forefather Hayc, the freedom-loving nahapet; they have always liked Ara, their handsome prince. They liked the way Hayc Nahapet and Ara the Fair behaved.

As to Shamiram, her wickedness, like that of Bel, was punished. Her selfish dreams never came true. She was killed by her own son.

Introduction to Story II

It goes without saying that at no time did the Armenians live an isolated life, but were in constant intercourse with other peoples. This is to be inferred from the semi-legendary stories that precede the recorded history of our people. The son of Ara the Fair is said to be Cadmos whose own son Anoushavan is described as "most wealthy and most gifted materially and mentally". He succeeds in winning back from enemy peoples the control of at least part of the lands of Armenia. An interesting detail about Anoushavan is, from a religious point of view, that he was known as "*sossanwer*" (that is, "dedicated to the willows"). Anoushavan, therefore, was high-priest and prince at the same time and was dedicated by his religious leaders to a forest of willows near the city of Armavir. We know that at one time the Armenians, as most other peoples, were worshippers of Nature and in order to find out whether future events would be propitious or not, they would consult the strange sounds that the wind would make blowing through the willow trees.

Indicative of the contact of the Armenians with the *Semitic peoples* is the story of one Cananidcs, a prince defeated by Joshua, who is said to have come to Armenia and established the principedom of Gndounik. The contact of the Armenians with the *Greeks* is seen in the story of Zarmayr. This descendant of Anoushavan is said to have gone to fight with King Priam in a battle the description of which by Homer gave to the world one of its very greatest literary masterpieces: the *Iliad*. The contact of the Armenians with the *Assyrians* is indicated in the story of Adramelik and Sarassar, two brothers, who are said to have killed their father Sennecherim and come to Armenia; thus, away from a despotic environment, they establish the princedoms of Ardzrounik and Gnounik. The date of Sennecherim's death is 680 B.C. From this date to the destruction of the great Assyrian capital of Nineveh there is a period of about 70 years of which very little is known. The date of the destruction of Nineveh is important to us

because in the razing of this great city took part the first Armenian king. His name was Parouyr. We know with a measure of accuracy that Parouyr was an ally of the Assyrian Nabopolassar and of the Mede Kyaxares. As a result of his help in the capture and destruction of Nineveh, in 612 B.C., Parouyr began to wear a crown.

From about 612 to about 330 B.C. Armenia was under the strong political influence of the Medes or Persians. The first Armenian prince in this period about whom we have accurate historical knowledge is Erwand. He is mentioned by Moses of Khoren, but more information about him is given by Xenophon, a famous Greek historian, philosopher and general. "Wishing to leave freedom to his descendants" Erwand built a new castle for himself and walls around his territory, even though the Medes would not look with favor upon such activities. A very precious excerpt of a song that we have from ancient Armenia goes back to his time. It seems to be the story of a smith, Vardkess by name, who was to build the door of the king's palace. He marries the king's sister and founds the town of Val'arshapat which is a town of great importance in our history.

Erwand was succeeded by his son Tigran I, a friend of the famous Persian king, Cyrus. He extends the frontiers of Armenia, reorganizes and strengthens the army and contributes considerably to the heightening of the cultural level of the land. His friendship with Cyrus keeps Armenia in peace, without which he could not carry out his reforms. But when, after the deaths of Cyrus and of Cyrus' son, a Persian dynasty known as the Achemenids comes into being, Armenia falls under their despotic yoke. After successfully repulsing four attacks by the Persians, Armenia becomes the 11th of the 23 provinces of the mighty Achemenid dynasty. Three of these attacks against Armenia were led by an Armenian general in the service of Darius, the head of the Achemenid dynasty. It is possible to speculate — though on the basis of meager evidence — that he may have given wrong reports to Darius in order to save the lives of his fellow Armenians.

The last representative of the house of Tigran I, Vahé, died in 330 B.C. At this same time Persia fell under the rule of Alexander the Great and the reign of a line of rulers known as the Seleucids began. This opened a new era in the history of Armenia, namely the period of Macedonian or Seleucid supremacy. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., his vast empire was divided among

his thirty-four most prominent generals. Berdiccas, however, to whom Alexander had given his ring, enjoyed more prestige than any other general. He designated Neoptolemy as governor of Armenia. But the Macedonian governors were generally despotic and so was this Neoptolemy. A successful revolt against him was led by the Armenian prince, Adward.

The most famous Seleucid ruler is Antiochus III. He defeated the Egyptians and the Parthians, but was defeated by the Romans in 190 B.C. It is at this time that Artashess I, along with Zareh or Zahran, another Armenian governor, revolted against Antiochus III. Artashess founded the kingdom of Greater Armenia (*Medz Hayk*). Zareh became the king of Lesser Armenia (*Pokr Hayk* or *Dzopatz Ashkharh*).

The Parthians invaded Armenia for the first time during the reign of Artavazd, the son of Artashess, at the turn of the first century B.C. and carried off Tigran, Artavazd's nephew (or son?) as hostage. Tigran returned a few years later from exile. He had no difficulty in occupying Lesser Armenia and in establishing himself over *all* of Armenia as Tigran II. In fact, this was only the beginning of his vast conquests. At no time during our entire history was Armenia greater territorially than during his reign. One of his ambitions was to revive in his vast empire the great Greek civilization. This ambition of Tigran the Great had far-reaching consequences and was ultimately instrumental in our having an early and accurate translation of the Bible from the Greek.

We should say a word about the religion of the Armenians in Tigran's time. It was his deliberate policy to have his people better acquainted with Hellenistic culture. This included the worship of the Greek gods and goddesses who were nevertheless given names that were already familiar in Armenia. Aramazd came to be identified with Zeus, Mihr with Hephaestus, Naneh with Pallas Athena, etc.

Aramazd is clearly Ahura Mazda, "the lord of wisdom" worshipped by Zoroaster (circ. 600 B.C.). This founder of a religion now known by his name placed great emphasis on morality. Zoroastrianism is an ethical religion. The ancient Armenians may have inherited their Anahit and Vahagn from the ancient Persians, possibly from before the days of Artaxerxes II (405 B.C.).

The influence of Assyria on our pre-Christian religion was negligible, though its goddess Tharada was visited by the Armenians in Hierapolis.

ARMENIA, FROM SEA TO SEA

(THE STORY OF TIGRAN THE GREAT)

Many hundreds of years ago a very great foreign general was the guest of the Armenian king. His name was Hannibal. The name of the Armenian king was Artashess. He was giving Hannibal protection against his enemies. One day King Artashess put on his scarlet clothes and invited Hannibal to go with him for a ride. In those days even kings, princes and their guests could use only horses whenever they wanted to see the country. As Artashess, Hannibal and their followers were riding along the river Araxes, they came to a beautiful locality. This was a rocky piece of land that was surrounded on three sides by the waters of the river. "Look," said Hannibal to Artashess, "this would be an ideal location for a town where you could live in safety. If you built a town here no enemy would ever be able to take it. It is already protected on three sides by the river, and all you have to do is to dig a trench on the fourth side, and you will be safe." Artashess welcomed the suggestion. He started to build a town on that location and named it Artashat, after his own name. This town became one of the most important towns in Armenia. It was the despair of its enemies.

Among the many enemies of Armenia were a people known as the *Parthians*. These people lived in a vast country beyond the southern frontier of Armenia; every so often they would assemble large armies and would attack our land, occupy parts of it and carry off our treasures. One day, one hundred and five years before the time of Jesus, when the king of Armenia was Artavazd, the Parthians came again in well-armed multitudes and wanted to take the strong town of Artashat. "Either you give us the town," they said to King Artavazd, "or we take

with us Tigran who is the heir to your throne. And in the future, if you do not do as we say, we shall put him to death." Since King Artavazd had no intention of doing harm to them, he let Tigran go with the Parthians. Thus Tigran was taken as a hostage.

He was not treated as a prisoner because he was of the Armenian royal family. He could wear all the clothes he wished, go hunting and have all the entertainment he wanted. He even had servants. But he could not go back to his native land and this, above all, made him very sad. There was nothing he could do. For ten years he stayed with the Parthians as a hostage. At the end of this period someone told him that King Artavazd of Armenia had died. Now *he* was the king of Armenia! No sooner did he see himself as wearing the crown than he realized once more that he was a prisoner. But Tigran knew no discouragement and was very shrewd. There was an account he could settle with the Parthian king. He asked for an audience with him.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I have a proposition to make to you. I am now the king of Armenia. If you let me go back to my country I will give you the seventy valleys which are just beyond the northern frontier of your kingdom and which now belong to me." The Parthian king accepted this condition and Tigran went back to Artashat.

Tigran's return was a glorious occasion. All the noblemen and ladies, all the princes, and a large crowd turned out to welcome him home. The new king sat on the throne of Armenia and he was known as Tigran the Second, because there had been another king by the name of Tigran before him. He had great ambitions for his country. He wanted to be a king not just of ordinary people, but a king of kings. He wanted to extend the frontiers of Armenia from one sea to another, that is, from the Caspian to the Mediterranean Sea.

When Tigran ascended the throne, Armenia was divided into two parts. One part was *Medz Hayk* (that is, Great Armenia); the other was *Pokr Hayk* (that is, Little Armenia). The

first task of King Tigran was to unite these two parts. He himself was the king of Great Armenia and he had to occupy Little Armenia. The king of Little Armenia was Artaness. He did not want to submit to Tigran, but he could not stand in his way. He lost his life and Tigran became the king of one united Armenia.

Kings usually marry the daughters of other kings. Tigran decided to marry the daughter of a king who ruled a land called Pontus. This land was on the western side of Armenia and had an important harbor on the Black Sea. The name of the king was Mihrthat. His daughter's name was Cleopatra. The day of the marriage was a great day for both Pontus and Armenia. Thousands of people were fed at the king's expense for many days. They would play games during the day and light torches at night and sing and dance in the streets.

After the merrymaking was over, King Tigran lost no time in turning against his enemies. He remembered that the Parthians had let him go only after taking seventy valleys from him. He went and took those valleys back. Then he conquered many other lands to the west and south of Armenia and came as far as a country called Phoenicia which was on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. His fame spread over the whole world. Because many kings were his subjects, Tigran the Second could now be called "King of Kings". Wherever he went on official business or for an official visit, four kings would *walk* ahead of him while he would be riding his white horse, in splendid clothes and wearing a crown of jewels.

The empire of *Tigran the Great*, as he was now called, was so vast that he had to divide it into no less than one hundred and twenty provinces. And then one capital was not enough. Just as Artashess had built the town of Artashat, Tigran the Great built another town at the other side of his empire and called it, after his own name, Tigranacairt. He tried to bring to Tigranacairt the most educated people of his time. They came from every country and even all the way from Greece. One of the Greeks who came was very famous; his name is not

easy to pronounce: it is Amphicrates. But people did not mind the difficulty of his name. He was a very educated man and he began to teach the children of the noblemen of the imperial town. In order to make his town even more attractive, Tigran the Great had it decorated with statues; it had many parks and it was surrounded with woods where not only the guests of the emperor but also other people could go hunting. Most important of all, Tigranacairt had a theatre where Greek plays were put on. These plays are famous to this day and are still produced from time to time in America and in other countries. The emperor's own son, Artavazd, was a writer of plays and of other books.

When the senators of Rome were informed of Tigran's popularity and successes, they became worried. "Perhaps," they thought, "the Armenian emperor will come and occupy our own lands." In order to prevent this from happening they sent one general after another to push Tigran the Great back to his original country. One of these generals was Lucullus. When Tigran the Great saw the Roman soldiers of Lucullus he laughed at them. "If these people are coming as messengers, they are too many," he said; "if they are coming to fight, they are too few." That was not a wise thing to say. The Roman general had only fourteen thousand men, but he was clever and put the army of Tigran the Great to flight. Yet he could never take the town of Artashat. The soldiers of Lucullus soon became so tired that they wanted to go back home. They would no longer obey Lucullus, and he had to plead with them. He tried to persuade them to wage a last battle for the capture of Artashat and return, perhaps, with the credit of another major victory added to their fame. His soldiers turned their empty pockets inside out, meaning that they had no money, they were hungry and they wanted to go home. But by that time another Roman general, Pompey, had come to Armenia. Tigran the Great was now advanced in years and tired. He received Pompey and his soldiers into his lands and even into Artashat without a fight. The painful moment came when he had to recognize the Roman general's

victory. He removed his purple cape and mounted his beloved horse. His destination, this time, was the Roman camp. As he rode along with his faithful attendants but without any kings on foot, keeping pace, he thought bitterly of his own son who had helped the Romans inflict this humiliation upon him.

The Roman legions did not fail to do him the usual honors. Even then Tigran the Great had to dismount, bow down, remove his tiara and his diadem and give them to Proconsul Pompey, signifying that he was, in fact, at the victor's mercy. Pompey is known for his generosity. He helped the aged king to his feet and returned the insignia to him. He meant that the Armenian king, now incapable of defying the great Roman empire, was still a sovereign in his own land.

Tigran's son went the way of all traitors. When, some time later, Pompey was passing under the arch of triumph in Rome, among the defeated who were following his chariot was Tigran's son. He was, for all intents and purposes, a prisoner. The men and women who lined the streets to watch the returning legions looked upon him with disdain.

King Tigran lived in Armenia ten more years as an ally of Rome. He died in 56 B.C. He was eighty-five years old.

No other conqueror is as important or as great in our history as Tigran the Second, the Great.

Introduction to Story III

As a result of the conflict between Tigran the Great and the Roman empire, Armenia was considerably weakened. Yet two advantages had accrued to our land: in the first place Armenia was no longer divided into “Greater” and “Lesser”. We had, in the second place, established cultural contacts with the western world. It is clear that without the work of Tigran the Great we would not have adopted Christianity at the time at which we did, nor would we have translated the Bible at the beginning of the fifth century B.C. As to the Roman empire, historians are of the opinion that it made a mistake in seeking, at the time, to make of Armenia a subject state rather than an ally. With Armenia weakened as a buffer state between the east and the west, the Roman and then the Byzantine empires exposed themselves to the open attacks of the *Parthians* and then of the *Sassanians*.

The Parthians, who were probably of Scythian origin, came down from the north and established their empire about 200 B.C. Their empire lasted over four hundred years. After a period of inimical policy toward Armenia they sought the aid of our people against Rome. The Parthians are reputed for having been light and swift cavalrymen. But for major military operations they needed heavy, armed cavalry—the sort of fighters that Armenia could furnish. Yet the Armenians sided with the Romans on account of cultural affinities. They did so consistently until they were ruthlessly victimized by Marc Antony.

In the year 36 B.C. Marc Antony led a campaign against the Parthians. As a result of a series of military mistakes, he was heavily defeated and was chased by the enemy into Armenia. Here he found friendship, as well as food and shelter for his surviving soldiers. Antony thanked the Armenian king, Artavazd III, for his hospitality and went to rejoin Cleopatra. One reason why he had hurried through the campaign and had lost his battles was his haste to return to this woman. Cleopatra then conceived the ambition of laying hands on the riches of

Armenia. She prevailed upon Antony to have Artavazd III summoned to her residence at Alexandria. They had the Armenian king, Antony's former ally, put to death and they sent the eldest of their illegitimate sons, Alexander, to occupy the throne of Armenia. In the meantime our land was plundered and treasures belonging either to the court or to the temples were carried off to Cleopatra's capital. In Armenia ill feeling toward Rome increased considerably and people became more sympathetic toward the Parthians. But the "people" at the time were hardly the masters of their own destiny. The ensuing developments were due to the fact that anti-Roman political sentiments were crystallized among an important section of the Armenian feudal nobility; consequently a pro-Parthian party came into prominence.

Around the beginning of the Christian era Rome had reached the height of its power, and although Armenia was never an integral part of the Roman empire, its internal affairs were largely determined by what the emperor decided with regard to our land which lay just beyond the farthest frontier—from Rome—of the Roman empire. As an over-all policy, after Pompey, the Romans wished to keep Armenia under Roman suzerainty without making it a part of the empire. This was, of course, in the interest of Rome, inasmuch as Armenia would thus serve as a buffer against the constant attacks of the Parthians. The Roman legions could fight against the enemy in a friendly Armenia, keeping all the while the ravages of war outside the Roman frontiers.

Marc Antony took his own life in 30 B.C. as a result of a defeat at Actium inflicted upon him by Octavius, the future Caesar Augustus who became the first emperor of Rome. At this date the legions of Antony were already withdrawn from Armenia and Artashess II, the son of Artavazd III, was reigning on the Armenian throne. To avenge his father's murder by Antony and Cleopatra, Artashess II had ordered all the Romans found in Armenia to be beheaded. His own reign lasted only ten years, a period during which the pro-Parthian party was in the ascendancy. The situation changed when Tigran III, the brother of Artashess II, came to Armenia from Rome (where he had been educated), accompanied by Tiberius, an adopted son of Octavius, and occupied the Armenian throne. Once again Armenia had a pro-Roman king and fell under Roman suzerainty. Tigran III was followed on the throne by his son Tigran IV who was killed in a war in 2 A.D. An attempt by Caesar Augustus to have a non-Armenian, pro-Roman king placed on the throne of Armenia failed as the result of a bloody

revolution instigated by the pro-Parthian nobility. The pro-Roman party was nevertheless influential and in 5 A.D. Tigran V came to the throne. The end of his reign in 16 A.D. saw a period of extreme confusion which was followed by a relatively peaceful period during the short reign of Zeno-Artashess. Zeno, a native of Pontus, was a prince who had found favour among the Romans and had simultaneously endeared himself to the Armenian people. Though his name was Zeno the Armenians at his coronation greeted him with the joyful shouts of, "Long live Artashess!"

In 34 A.D. Zeno-Artashess died and he was followed on the throne by another Roman favorite, Mithridates or Mihrthat. During the reign of the Roman Caligula (emperor from 37 to 41 A.D.) Mihrthat lost the favor of the Romans, because the Parthians for a short time became friends with the latter, and he was imprisoned in Rome. King Sanatrouc, during whose reign the apostles of Christ came to Armenia, seems to have reigned in the absence of Mihrthat, for Mihrthat came back from Rome and reascended the throne in 45 A.D.

It is clear from the above summary account that the apostles brought the message of Christianity to an Armenia torn by civil strife and constant wars. The Greek-Parthian divinities could no longer impart to the people the meaning they sought in the midst of all this confusion, insecurity, poverty and bloodshed. The apostles came to their Jewish compatriots of whom there were many in Armenia. They could sow the seeds of the new religion among the people because both the Romans and the Parthians were tolerant toward new religious ideas, as long as these did not seriously threaten them. This explains why Thaddeus could work largely unmolested until his message had shaken the royal family itself out of its worn-out and useless convictions.

Reference is made in our story to the earliest form of the Divine Liturgy. This was probably a meal, the *khabourah*, which was a Jewish practice and may have been the one observed at the Last Supper. The elder of a group of not less than three would take, break and distribute the bread with a prayer. The other foods and wine would be consumed similarly. Grace would be said over the last cup of wine, the "cup of blessing," which would be tasted by the leader and then passed to the other partakers in the meal. Psalms and a prayer of dismissal would end the rite.

THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED IN ARMENIA

(THE STORY OF THADDEUS AND SANDOUKHT)

The most famous province of ancient Armenia was Taron. Amidst the forests of Taron stood a temple built for the goddess Anahit. Over her golden, diamond- and ruby-studded statue there was an inscription: "The great Lady Anahit, the Glory and Life-giver of the Nation, Whom all Kings honor, Who is the Mother of all Sobriety and a great Benefactress of all Mankind."

Another temple housed the colossal statue of Aramazd, "the lord of wisdom," the counterpart, in Armenia, of the Greek Zeus. It was seated on a marble throne, its body covered with polished ivory, its clothes made of leaves of gold. It held a golden sceptre in its hand. The second half of the name of Aramazd is the same as the root of *Mazdeism*. *Mazdeism* was a Persian religion. By the early years of the first century it had turned into the worship of fire.

There were in Armenia many other gods and goddesses. As time passed, the people of Armenia became disillusioned with them. They came to see that to sacrifice their best heifers and horses to them was a waste, that Anahit was not the glory and the life-giver of the nation, and that Aramazd was not the lord of wisdom. For the relief of their misery and the answers to their problems they must turn elsewhere. They still, on occasion, sang and flew doves around the temples, decked things out in roses and made merry. But the more sensitive among them had begun to question everything. Then a man came to Armenia. Paganism lingered on for three hundred more years. His arrival had marked the beginning of the end.

* * *

We know that the twelve disciples specially chosen by Christ to preach the gospel began to do so on the day of Pentecost. That day the apostle Thaddeus knew that he would eventually

go east in order to spread the new faith. The apostles could not resist the call of God and Thaddeus started out on his own mission without delay. He traveled mostly on foot. He would preach on the road, in the streets of towns and villages, in market places, in private houses and in synagogues. He was so interested in what he had to say to people that he never worried about himself, about what he would eat or wear. "God will provide," he would say to himself; and as long as he was willing to work if necessary, he did not lack food or clothing. As he traveled eastward the country became more and more mountainous and colder and colder. The apostle was not used to this kind of cold weather, but he kept going and preaching along the way. When he came to the town of Shavarshan—where the king of Armenia had his palace—he discovered that here too people were eager to know and follow the new religion. Thaddeus converted many of them to Christianity.

Several years passed. Many ladies and noblemen at the palace of the king had heard of the new religion. Among these was Sandoukht, the beautiful daughter of Sanatrouc, the king. One day she decided to find out about the new religion for herself. She put on ordinary clothes and a servant led her to the house where the Christians used to hold their secret meetings. Thaddeus was there. He was speaking of the teachings, of the death and of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The princess had heard this name many times before, but as she was sitting there among ordinary people, this name coming from the lips of one who had known him made a sweet impression on her. There was a certain freshness about the message of the apostle as though he were delivering it for the first time. His face and the faces of those who were listening to him shone with a mysterious brightness. As the princess came out of that meeting she was troubled. She knew in her heart that he of whom the apostle was speaking had died for her sake too.

The princess also knew that her father would be the greatest obstacle to her accepting the faith. But she felt that she had to follow the true religion. She received secret instructions from the

apostle. She came to see more and more that Christianity was far superior to what she had believed before. One night she never went to bed because she could not bring herself to stop praying. "O my God, O my Saviour Jesus Christ, give me courage to declare to the whole world my true convictions!" she said aloud and was amazed at her own words. The next day all her difficulties had vanished. She went and was baptized in the midst of her rejoicing fellow Christians and she received the holy communion for the first time. She knew that she was receiving from the hands of the apostle the wine and the bread which were the blood and the body of Jesus Christ. She felt in her palpitating heart that God was in her and she was in God. No one on the face of the earth was more joyful on that day than the princess of Armenia.

Sanatrouc did not know much about anything except fighting, wining and dining. He called a priest of the old religion, a *mobed*, to win his daughter back to his gods and goddesses, but it was all very useless. Truth is the most precious thing in the world and once one has it one does not give it up. The *mobed* himself felt that Sandoukht was like one standing on a solid rock while he himself was standing on shifting sands.

"If this Jesus was God why did he die on the cross? Why didn't he destroy his enemies?" he shouted.

"Jesus did not do things the way *you* would," said the princess in a soft voice. "He died on the cross because he *chose* to do so, so that all men may be saved, so that all men may go to heaven."

"Why should you accept a *foreign* religion?" cried the *mobed*, but the princess was not disturbed.

"What difference does it make," she answered, "who teaches the truth, as long as it *is* the truth?"

There was no argument that Sandoukht could not answer in her quiet way.

The king and the *mobed* were exasperated. The king ordered the guards to put her in jail. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "torture will cause her to change her mind." The prison was cold

and damp and dark. The princess was in chains, and water and some bread were all she was given as drink and food. Sometimes she would become very weak. She would compare this life to the life she had at the palace. Then she would remember why she was in prison and gladness would fill her soul. For it is better to live in the truth, though in a prison, than in falsity and in a beautiful palace.

The news of the imprisonment of the princess rocked all of Armenia. Those who had never heard of Christianity before heard of it now and many people sought to learn about this religion. Some pagans still thought that *their* religion was the true one; but many other pagans were afraid that if the new religion came to be the religion of the land, they would be out of their jobs and would lose their temples with all the jewels, gold and silver and cattle and real estate that went with them.

In the meantime many had already died for the sake of Christ. From her prison Princess Sandoukht encouraged other Christians to prefer the shedding of their blood for Christ to the burning of incense before idols and false gods. The news of these events reached the king and he was more furious than ever. He ordered her once more to the palace.

The king could hardly recognize his own daughter. In her old and tattered clothes she did not look like a princess at all. Sanatrouc felt sorry for her, but not for long. He lowered his head and looked at his daughter with joined eyebrows. All Sandoukht could see on his face were two black eyes burning with anger.

“I no longer have patience with you,” the king roared, waving his finger, “you will have to choose here and now.” He was pointing at two objects that were lying on a table and that Sandoukht saw for the first time: a queen’s crown and a sword.

“Either you renounce your new religion and prepare to become a queen,” said the king, “or keep your religion and die by this sword.”

There was no one else in the room. The princess was tired and spent. The chains were removed but she could still feel their

weight. She could hardly stand up. She looked at the crown, then at the sword, then at her father. She remembered herself as a child on the knees of that terrible man. She imagined herself killed and her warm blood running on the rocks at the place of execution and dripping from the knife of the executioner. Then suddenly the love of Christ filled her heart. She looked at her father again. There was love in her eyes.

“Father,” she said, “if you had only a spark of the love of Christ in your heart you would know that if I have to choose, there is only one of those objects I *can* choose.”

“Which? which?” shouted the king in his hard ignorance.

“I choose the sword,” said the princess with surprising calm.

“Guards!” shouted the king in a rage of madness. Two armed men rushed in at once.

“Drag her out,” the king yelled, “drag her out to the place of execution and let her meet her death!”

The king’s orders were carried out. Sandoukht shed her blood for Jesus Christ. She is the first woman-martyr of the Armenian church, and we sing of her proudly in our sharacans.

* * *

King Sanatrouc went on ordering executions of Christians like a madman. The most notable victim of his rage was Thaddeus himself. Thaddeus was the first man who preached the religion of Christ in Armenia. In this work he was not alone. The apostle Bartholomew also worked in Armenia. He too was martyred by King Sanatrouc. The apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew have thus laid the foundations of the Armenian church. Bartholomew had converted the sister, Vogouhe, of Sanatrouc. She, too, was killed by order of the same king, and so was a captain, Terentius, who had been converted by Vogouhe. There were hundreds of other martyrs. But the more their blood ran, the greater the church became.

Introduction to Story IV

The towering figure of Saint Gregory the Enlightener* appears on the scene of the history of Armenia toward the end of the third century. Saint Gregory played the key role in the mass conversion of the Armenian people, but he did not, of course, introduce Christianity into Armenia. He is the “second enlightener” of our people. Our “first enlighteners” were the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew.

From the time of the apostles to that of Saint Gregory there is a period of about two and a half centuries. We shall see presently that during this period, and for a considerable time thereafter, Armenia was often a battleground where the armies of two giant empires met. To the west of Armenia lay the Roman empire which eventually came to be known as the Byzantine empire. To the south and southeast of Armenia extended the Parthian empire which, following uprisings that took place in 226 A.D., became the Sassanian empire. The story of these uprisings is of great importance to the history of our people and we shall come back to them in a moment. But first we must have an idea of what the situation was in Armenia from the time of Sanatrouc to 226 A.D.

We may remember that Sanatrouc, the persecutor of the apostles, had assumed power in the absence of Mihrthat. The latter returned to Armenia under the Roman emperor Claudius, but his reign did not last long. He was asphyxiated under heavy blankets by his nephew Rhamizt, a Georgian, who had chosen this ghastly means of murdering his uncle in order to fulfill his promise that he would not kill him by the sword or poison! The Armenians could not tolerate this blood-thirsty adventurer. They put him to flight. As he and his pregnant wife, Zenobia, came to the river Araxes, she could no longer follow her husband on horseback and asked him to kill her so as to escape the vengeance of the people. Rhamizt obliged, or thought he did, and sped

*Also known as Saint Gregory the Illuminator.

on. She was later found, still alive, by Armenian shepherds. They took her to their king who was now Tirid or Trdat, a man of Parthian origin.

Meanwhile the ill-famed Nero, Emperor of Rome, had sent forces to Armenia. These were under the command of Corbulo, the general who later had to commit suicide when Nero's capricious wrath turned against him. Corbulo burned the city of Artashat and took Tigranacairt. The Parthians gave in to the superior forces of the Romans and signed a treaty. In a solemn ceremony Trdat, the Armenian king of Parthian descent, took off his crown with the understanding that he would not wear it again until it was given to him by Nero personally. He then went to Rome to receive his crown. In Rome the emperor had him sit on his right-hand side and in a symbolic gesture put the crown back on Trdat's head. This meant that the Armenian king was under Roman suzerainty. Trdat I returned to Armenia with many technicians to rebuild his ravaged cities. He remained loyal to the Romans until the end of his days which coincided with the reign of the Roman emperor Vespasian. The date of his death is not certain. It may have occurred around 75 A.D.

We may easily imagine that by this time there were in Armenia two competing political opinions: pro-Roman and pro-Parthian. In other words there were people who resented the fact that the kings of Armenia should be crowned by Rome. This political unrest came to a head when the emperor Trajan of Rome went a step further. He refused to give a crown to the ruler of Armenia and wished to govern Armenia through a Roman *praetor* or magistrate. The ensuing turmoils opened a new page in Armenian history. From the year 117 to 218 the kings of Armenia were chosen from among the Armenian nobility itself and the country knew an almost independent development. The most famous king of this period was Artashess. He held his kingship with the consent of the Roman emperor Hadrian but he received the crown from the hands of one of his faithful subjects whose name was Simbat.

Few rulers have, in the course of history, won the sympathy of their people to the extent to which Artashess did. The story of his marriage to Sathenic is the subject-matter of one of the rare pieces of poetry that have come down to us from those times. Commerce prospered during his reign due, partly, to a new system of accounting. New roads were built and there was a general cultural renewal. Subsequent

to the division of his kingdom among his sons, Artashess took sick at Bagouracairt. He sent messengers to Eriza to implore the goddess Anahit to give him health. He died before the messengers returned. The pomp with which he was buried is proverbial. Legend had it that Artavazd, who was jealous of his father Artashess, was chained in a cave as punishment for his jealousy. Two dogs were said to chew at his chains constantly. Eventually the chains would be worn away and Artavazd would emerge to destroy the world. But some believed that his chains would never wear out so long as the good smiths of Armenia hit their anvils three times each Sunday with the intention of keeping Artavazd bound for ever.

In 218 A.D. the Roman empire reverted to its original policy of crowning the Armenian kings. As a result Trdat II received his right to reign from the Romans. After his death Khosrov (Chosroes) the Great occupied the Armenian throne. With him a new dynasty, the **HOUSE OF ARSACIDS**, begins to reign in Armenia.

Khosrov was the brother of the Parthian emperor Artaban IV. At this time the Roman danger had diminished but an internal crisis rocked the Parthian empire. An adventurer, Artashir by name, managed to pass himself as a descendant of Cyrus the Great and seized power. He thus became the first *Sassanian* "king of kings." Now Khosrov the Great in Armenia was the last remnant of the *Parthians*, the sworn enemies of the Sassanians. Nor was the Sassanian Artashir able to defeat the Parthian Khosrov in war. The Sassanians therefore sent a traitor, Anac, to Armenia to eliminate Khosrov. Anac was the father of Gregory the Enlightener. The son of Khosrov was Trdat III (the Great).

The Sassanians were violently anti-Roman. Unlike the Parthians, they were not tolerant; and from a narrow, chauvinistic point of view proceeded to persecute systematically all things that they believed to be non-Sassanian. They went back to the worship of fire.

The heads of the church in Armenia between the apostle Bartholomew and Saint Gregory the Enlightener are listed by Archbishop Mal'akia Ormanian as follows: Saint Zachariah (68-72); Saint Zementos (72-76); Saint Atrnerseh (77-92); Saint Moushe (93-123); Saint Shahenn (124-150); Saint Shavarsh (151-171); Saint Leontius (172-190); Saint Mehruzhan (240-270?). Dionysius, whose letter is mentioned in the story, was the bishop of Alexandria in the first half of the third century.

THE CONVERSION OF ARMENIA

(THE STORY OF SAINT GREGORY THE ENLIGHTENER*)

I

We have all seen bishops. When a bishop preaches in our church he holds a staff of a kind that clergymen of a lower rank have no right to use. A bishop's staff, though sometimes made of precious metals, reminds us of the long sticks that shepherds use to guard their flocks. The meaning is that a bishop is to the faithful what a shepherd is to his flock. A man cannot become a bishop simply by wishing to become one and going to school. He must be ordained by another bishop who, in turn, has been ordained by still another before him. The very first bishops were thus ordained by the apostles themselves.

The apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew ordained the first bishops of Armenia. They had come to our ancient country and had told the people about the wonderful things that Jesus Christ had said and done in Palestine. They also informed them that He had died on the cross and risen from the dead. "He is God," they said, "and the whole world ought to obey and worship Him." At the time, however, not all people were ready to believe that what the apostles declared was true. Moreover, it was dangerous to believe in Jesus Christ for in Armenia, as elsewhere in the world, the rulers would not allow the people to hold religious beliefs contrary to their own.

Yet there were in Armenia many people discerning and courageous enough to follow the apostles rather than the pagan king. They were the first Armenian Christians. Because they were persecuted, the early Christians would hold their meetings secretly under the leadership of their bishops who were ordained by the apostles. They celebrated the Divine Lit-

*Also known as Saint Gregory the Illuminator.

urgy (or Patarag), presided over the meetings, and saw to it that the Christians lived in peace with each other as in a big family.

For nearly three hundred years the kings were against Christianity and false and frightful rumors circulated against it. Even then the church grew larger and larger. The center of the Armenian church was at Artaz where Saint Thaddeus had been martyred. The headquarters of a church is known as a *see*. This word actually means the chair on which the bishop sits when he is engaged in his official work. The see of Artaz was occupied by an unbroken succession of bishops. One of these bishops was Mehruzhan. We know about him from a letter that a Greek bishop, Dionysius, wrote—as the historian tells us—"to those who are in Armenia, whose bishop is Mehruzhan."

The king of Armenia was, in those times, a powerful ruler. His name was Khosrov. The king of neighboring Persia, Artashir by name, did not like Khosrov. He had killed some relatives of Khosrov in order to become king and was afraid that Khosrov might some day take vengeance. But Artashir could not defeat Khosrov in battle. He therefore plotted to have Khosrov killed. He sent to Armenia one of his subjects, Anac, to carry out his evil plan. No one ever remembers Anac with sympathy, for he was a murderer and a hypocrite. He was of the same family as Khosrov. As he set foot in our land he lied to people and told them that he was running away from Artashir and that he was trying to find refuge in friendly Armenia.

King Khosrov the Great knew nothing of the plot. He received Anac with great honors and gave him a warm welcome at the palace. One way of showing his trust and friendship was to invite his guest—as he did one day—to go hunting with him. That night Anac made his foul plans. He had brought his wife and children with him in order to make Khosrov believe that he had left Persia not to return. He told his wife to be ready to leave the next day.

When the devil wants to take a man into the worst parts of hell he whispers into his ear: "kill another man!" Artashir was

an obnoxious tool in the hands of the devil. And Anac was a tool in the hands of the devil and of Artashir. In the thick of the forest he suddenly found himself alone with King Khosrov. "Now . . . now . . ." he said to himself; then, with his long spear, he wounded the king mortally. When the king's guards returned, they found him dying. He could hardly breathe but had enough time to order the execution of Anac and of all his family. Anac was caught before he could cross the border and the order of the king was carried out. Two children of Anac escaped the execution. The smaller of these children was a one-year-old baby. He was to become Saint Gregory the Enlightener (or Sourb Grigor Loussavorich). His nurse, Sophia, cared for him.

Anac whose execution was by drowning must have thought in his last moments of the many rewards that the king of Persia had promised him. Artashir himself died within a year, without seeing the realization of any of his plans. But his death brought no relief to Armenia. Artashir's son, Shapur, intended to finish the work begun by his father. Nor were his ambitions limited to Armenia alone. He fought the Romans as well and succeeded in making of Valerian, the emperor, a prisoner of war. An Armenian nobleman had, in the meantime, become the ruler of Armenia. His name was Artavazd. He wrote to Shapur to tell him what he thought of Valerian's capture:

"I share in your glory," the ruler of Armenia said to the Persian monarch, "but, I am afraid, rather than carry a victory we have only poured more fuel on the flames of war . . . All you did was to jail an old man, and you roused against you the peoples of the world; perhaps you roused them against us too, because we sent you auxiliary troops; we, as your neighbours, are always troubled on account of your hostilities with the commonwealth of Rome."

We do not know whether Shapur did or did not follow the advice of the Armenian ruler. What we do know is that Persian pressure kept increasing for a time in Armenia after Khosrov's murder. Shapur would have liked very much to have put an end to Khosrov's dynasty. To this dynasty belonged Trdat who was

nowhere to be found in the zones of Persian influence. The fact is that he, along with his sister Khosrovidoukht, had left the country. It is even possible that Artavazd was the very one who had arranged their escape. The heir to the Armenian throne spent his entire youth in the great cities of the Roman empire. He fought alongside Galerius, in the armies of Emperor Diocletian of Rome. Diocletian and he became good friends. He was preparing to return to Armenia to free his country from Persian rule. Gregory, Anac's son, was also preparing for a liberating mission, but they knew nothing of each other.

Gregory grew up in the city of Caesarea. There were many Christians in this city and many Christian teachers. As he grew up Gregory learned from these teachers about Christianity. He was then baptized and became a very learned and devout Christian. He was also very courageous and intelligent.

Many years later Trdat, the son of King Khosrov, left Rome to occupy his father's throne in Armenia. On his way there he passed by Caesarea where he met Gregory. Since Gregory had become a learned man, Trdat proposed that he become his secretary. Gregory was glad to accept the offer and join the king. He was already married and had two sons: Werthaness and Aristakess.

There was a large crowd waiting for the king at a village in Armenia, called Eriza. Great preparations had been made to receive him. The people were particularly pleased to know that he was coming to drive the Persians out. At the place of merrymaking there was a great statue of Anahit. This was a very important goddess worshipped in the land of Armenia at that time. They thought she was the goddess of the earth.

In the midst of the happy talk, laughter and shouts of joy, when most people were full of wine, Trdat invited all his guests to worship Anahit and to thank her for his own safe return home as a king. He himself worshipped Anahit first, and when Gregory's turn came, he wanted him to do likewise and offer a wreath of flowers to the goddess.

Everybody waited for Gregory to do so. Who could ignore the king's orders? But Gregory did not move. The king grew somewhat annoyed and repeated his order. Even then Gregory did not move. This was a very grave offense, punishable by death. All the dignitaries were shocked. "Who does he think *he* is?" they asked each other. "Is he stronger than Trdat?" a lady whispered. Wine had stopped being poured. The silver bowls did not tinkle. There was a heavy silence over all. Gregory slowly rose to his feet and spoke solemnly: "I am a Christian and I do not worship figures made of gold, iron or wood. Although I am Your Majesty's most humble servant, I owe my first loyalty to Jesus Christ Who is my Lord and my God. I humbly beg Your Majesty to excuse me, but I refuse to worship Anahit and to offer her a wreath."

A murmur of astonishment and awe rose in the crowd. The king did not seem to know that Gregory was a Christian. He did not, at any rate, expect this disobedience from a secretary.

"Take him!" he roared in extreme anger and sudden hatred. "Take him and give him all the punishments that a Christian deserves!" These punishments were ghastly tortures. They included, for instance, running on ground covered with thorns and upright nails.

When the king learned from an old prince that Gregory was the son of Anac, his rage knew no bounds. He gave him the worst punishment. He sent him to the town of Artashat and there had him thrown into a deep pit (*Khor Virap*), in the damp darkness of which people became food to creeping animals.

But Gregory did not die. An unknown widow was moved to kindness and she fed him whenever she could. She was, perhaps, protected by the king's sister. It was ordained at any rate that this son of a criminal be taken out of the pit by the king's sister herself, that he might become one of the world's most beloved church leaders.

Introduction to Story V

One of the best known stories that our historians tell us about King Trdat has to do with the Gayanian and Rhipsimian nuns. Even if this tragic tale is not historically accurate, it reveals certain convictions of our historians. They believed, in the first place, that King Trdat attained a superior morality as a result of his conversion. They were further convinced that Christianity is a healing religion, and that a person who has seen the light of Christianity can no longer live without it. It was therefore understandable that a woman like Rhipsime should prefer death to the favours of the king and that her religious superior, Gayane, should urge her to resist the royal advances. The story as told by our historians is as follows:

A wave of persecutions by the Roman emperor, Diocletian, brought to Armenia a group of nuns. The superior of the group was Gayane, and the most beautiful among them was Rhipsime. Her beauty was known throughout the Roman empire and she could not very well remain hidden among the vines near Val'arshapat where the nuns had established themselves and eked out a living through work with beads. The news of her presence on Armenian territory reached the king who immediately summoned her to his palace. He tried everything in his power to win her favours. At one time he devoted to that purpose seven consecutive hours. Rhipsime fought back all his advances and, at an opportune moment, tore herself away from the hands of the king and, thereby, from all the comfort and honors that an easy assent held in store for her. She joined her sisters, but soldiers caught her before long. With the other women of the group she was subjected to degrading tortures that ended of course in death. As a consequence of the execution of these innocent women, Trdat lost his very humanity. He no longer had even the appearance of a man. He acted like a boar, and began to look like one.

The truth of this story is not so much in its details as in its dramatic impact. It is also true in the sense that it is typical of the con-

ditions under which the Christians lived during periods of persecution in Armenia and elsewhere. One of the most important documents which give us an accurate picture of these conditions is a letter by Pliny the Younger (a Latin author and statesman) written to Trajan, the emperor of Rome from 98 to 117 A.D. When he wrote this letter Pliny was the governor of Bithynia, a province of the Roman empire. This is what he says to the emperor:

“Sire, it is my custom to refer to you all matters about which I am doubtful: for who is better able to direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I have never been present at trials of Christians and therefore I do not know what are the usual penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed. I have hesitated a great deal on the question of whether there should be any distinction of ages; whether the weak should have the same treatment as the more robust; whether those who recant should be pardoned, or whether a man who has ever been a Christian should gain nothing by ceasing to be such; whether the mere name of Christian, apart from crime, is punishable, or only crime coupled with the name.

“Meanwhile in the case of those reported to me as Christians, I have followed this procedure: I ask them whether they are Christians. If they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, with threats of punishment. If they persist in their confession, I order them to be led to execution . . . Then the usual result followed; the very fact of my dealing with the question spread the crime and more varieties occurred . . . All who denied that they were or ever had been Christians should, I thought, be discharged, for they invoked the gods at my prompting and worshipped, with incense and wine, your image which I ordered to be brought for that purpose, along with the images of the gods; and especially because they reviled Christ, a thing which, it is said, a Christian can never be compelled to do . . .”

Trajan's reply to this letter is equally interesting. With typical Roman respect for the law he writes: “. . . No hard and fast rule, no formula for universal application can be laid down. The Christians are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation—that if anyone denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is, by worshiping our gods, however suspect he may have been in the past, shall obtain pardon by penitence. Anonymous pamphlets should carry no

weight in any charge whatsoever. It is a thing of the worst example, and out of keeping with this age."

The systematic, mass persecution of the Christians began after Trajan, under the emperor Decius in the middle of the third century and under Diocletian from whom the Gayanians are said to have fled. For a considerable time Trdat followed the example of Diocletian. Yet the people of Armenia were ready for Christianity. The existing religions did not satisfy them in any profound way; the common people lived constantly in a situation of war; there were unbearable social injustices. There was also, and this was peculiar to Armenia, a cultural tension between the Persian and the Roman ways of life. Men longed for standards and moral ideals that would assure a better and purer living. They saw life being frittered away all around them and sought answers to the most pressing issues of their existence. They yearned for redemption, and the brotherhood of all men under one God satisfied their desire for human equality. In the divine-human person of the one Lord they saw the reconciliation of the spiritual, cultural, social and psychological conflicts in which they lived.

Toward the end of the third century there were a great many Christians in Armenia. If the percentage of the Christians there was half as high as in Asia Minor, then we may safely assume that about a fourth of the population of the land had become Christians. Christianity needed simply official approval in order to emerge to the surface with great vigor. Yet paganism had the advantage of having an organized priesthood on its side, and this consideration helps us to appraise the energy with which Saint Gregory carried out his mission.

The reputed lycanthropy of Trdat was symbolic of the condition of his country. The luminous face of Saint Gregory broke through fifteen years of abject imprisonment, bringing salvation to the sick and ailing.

After the official adoption of Christianity in Armenia the country experienced a renewed vigor as if in keeping with the restoration of the king's health. Trdat built fortresses and monuments at least one of which was inscribed "in Hellenic writing". He contributed generously to the building of religious edifices, and to make it possible for them to function properly, he divided each shire under his rule into seven sections two of which were given to the church. In each of the fifteen provinces of Armenia a sizable plot of land was given to Gregory the Enlightener personally.

THE CONVERSION OF ARMENIA

(THE STORY OF SAINT GREGORY THE ENLIGHTENER)

II

Two friends were sitting in the shade of a tree in a vineyard near the city of Val'arshapat in ancient Armenia. One of them was a foreigner. He was a businessman who had come to Armenia from far-away western lands. Both men were very sad and silent. Presently a young man riding a beautiful horse appeared on the field beyond the trees. His puffy red trousers were showing underneath his long silken coat. His rings and other jewelry that he wore on his breast were glittering in the sun. As he rode back and forth trying to teach tricks to his horse, the foreigner saw that one of his shoes was red, the other black.

"Why is he wearing shoes of different colors?" inquired the foreigner.

"Well," said his friend, "only the king can wear two red shoes. It's a silly custom," he went on, "they wear those things and ride horses all day long. At night they go to banquets and that's their life. *We* have to do all the work and pay all sorts of taxes besides. And now that the cat is sick all the mice are out playing and feasting."

"What cat?" asked the foreigner.

"Why, the king!" said his Armenian friend.

The king of Armenia had indeed been stricken with an unusual sickness. It happened one day as he was getting ready to go hunting. Suddenly he began to shake all over; then he let out a big shout the like of which had never been heard before and fell out of his chariot. Presently he stood on his feet and ran and disappeared into the woods. At the time the king was not a young man, but he was still very strong. In fact, the strength of King Trdat was known in many lands. People remembered the day when he had carried the armour of his wounded horse on

top of his own and had swum across the river to join his friends. On another occasion he had climbed up the wall of an enemy castle all alone and had thrown down bales of fodder for the horses of his own army. He had also hurled down the big guards of the castle along with their wild dogs. King Trdat was the one who had wrestled with and defeated the savage chief of the Goths when no one in the whole Roman army would dare approach that powerful barbarian. And now that the king had disappeared into the woods no one would dare go after him.

At the end of the day the king came back by himself. He looked strange, but when he saw his people, he quieted down and did not say anything. He would utter queer sounds and would not eat.

Like the man who was sitting under the tree with the foreigner, people all over the land were very much worried. They did not know what to do. They loved their strong king who was at the same time very learned. They boiled all the herbs that would cure strange sicknesses and gave him the juices to drink. They went on pilgrimages to the temples and prayed to all the gods they knew. It was all very useless. Many noblemen laughed at the people who went to the temples. The noblemen and many educated people did not believe in the gods at all. They knew that what they called the gods were no more than beautiful statues.

There was one person in Armenia who was concerned about the king most of all. Princess Khosrovidoukht had dreams about her brother. As time went by, she became more and more certain that the lone prisoner in the deep pit of the dungeon at Artashat had the power to cure the king. She believed that he had a power that one could receive only from Jesus Christ. Saint Gregory had been in the pit for years. But the princess knew that he was alive. One day she made up her mind and sent for him.

Saint Gregory's coming out of the pit was such an important day for Armenia that the Armenian church still celebrates the event every year.

One of his first concerns was to heal the king. Then he gathered together the relics of those who had been martyred in Armenia for the sake of Christ. Two of these martyrs were Gayane and Rhipsime, of noble families.

One night St. Gregory was thinking of Gayane, Rhipsime, Mariane and other martyrs who had laid down their lives for the Lord Christ. He was meditating on the rewards that they must have received in heaven, when suddenly, as the historian tells us, he saw a vision. In his vision the heavens opened and a man with a radiant face came down and called him by his name: "Gregory!" he said. The saint looked up and saw something like a stream of light pouring upon the earth from above. St. Gregory recognized in the person who came down from heaven the Only-Begotten ("Miadzin", that is, Jesus Christ). Jesus held in his hand a golden knocker. With this object he tapped the ground. At that spot there appeared to the saint a huge column of fire, with clouds on top of the column, and a cross of light on top of the clouds. Three other similar columns also appeared to Saint Gregory, but these were smaller in size. He knew, as he woke from the vision, that at the place of the tallest column was to stand the mother cathedral of the Armenian church. It was to be called "*Etchmiadzin*," meaning "the Only-Begotten descended."

At the places of the three other columns Saint Gregory proceeded to build churches dedicated to Saint Gayane, Saint Rhipsime and Saint Mariane. This last church is known as the church of Saint Shol'acath. Even the king worked to build these churches. He now put his great strength to the service of Jesus Christ. One day he disappeared for seven days. He was looking for stones from Mount Ararat to be used in the construction of these churches. He carried them himself. The queen and the ladies of Armenia, along with Princess Khosrovidoukht, carried things and helped build. When more money was needed, they gave their jewelry. The men and women of the nobility and the ordinary people had never known, together and by themselves, such happiness in their lives before.

Saint Gregory preached, gave counsel to the confused, help to the needy, and courage to the weak. The church of Armenia was growing every day, and it soon became necessary to have a catholicos as the official head of the church. A meeting was held at the city of Val'arshapat. The king himself, as well as the queen, Princess Khosrovidoukht and the notables of the land, attended. This was the first meeting in the history of the Armenian church for the election of a catholicos. No one could think of casting a vote for anyone other than Saint Gregory. He was escorted to Caesarea in a gold-gilt carriage drawn by white mules and there he was ordained and consecrated a bishop.

Upon his return to Armenia Saint Gregory stopped by the river Aradzani. There he baptized nearly one hundred thousand people. Some of the people who were baptized were priests of the old religion. One of these, Albianus, even became a bishop.

King Trdat went to meet the returning head of the Armenian church at Bagrevand, at the foot of Mount Nepat, on the shores of the river Euphrates. Then they returned to Bagavan, the capital city of the province. Saint Gregory ordered one month of prayers and abstinence as a preparation for the baptism. At the end of this month a great multitude gathered near the river. An event of unusual importance was about to take place. There was no Christian king at the time in the whole world. A king was going to be baptized. King Trdat walked into the water, joined his hands and bowed his head. Saint Gregory poured water on his head and baptized him with great solemnity. Many of the Christians who had been hiding in caves and who had shuddered at the mere mention of his name only a few years earlier, raised their tearful eyes to heaven and gave thanks to God with a loud voice. Now it was the turn of the queen; after the queen the princess, then the princes, then the noblemen, then the people. They were all baptized clad in white. Saint Gregory celebrated the Divine Liturgy. They all received holy communion. The festivities lasted seven days. They were days of joy, days of thanksgiving. Armenia was now a Christian

state and there was no other Christian state in the whole world. The year was 303 A.D.

Saint Gregory worked twenty more years. In these twenty years he changed the face of Armenia. Instead of the old temples there were churches; instead of magi and *mobeds* there were priests and bishops; instead of paganism young people learned the Christian religion. He established church laws and decided how the religious services should be held. Instead of the old gods and goddesses, Jesus Christ was worshipped openly in the far corners of the land. Saint Gregory who spread the light of Christ to Armenia is known as Saint Gregory the Enlightener or Sourb Grigor Loussavorich. He was 82 years old when he died. He had spent the last years of his life praying and meditating in the mountains alone.

King Trdat died seven years later. At one time he had had St. Gregory thrown into jail. But then they became companions and worked for the same cause. Today we cannot think of the one without his friendship for the other.

Introduction to Story VI

In our last story we gave the date of the baptism of Trdat the Great as 303 A.D. This date is fixed by an eminent Armenian historian, Archbishop Mal'akia Ormanian. On the other hand, two non-Armenian historians are of the opinion that Trdat "was converted by Gregory the Illuminator and adopted the Christian faith" as early as 294 A.D. These historians are Arthur Upham Pope, Director of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology, and Eduard Meyer who taught ancient history at the University of Berlin. It must be observed that Pope and Meyer do not speak of the *baptism* of Trdat the Great. The year 303 is given as that of his baptism, because Saint Gregory could not have performed this sacrament on the king before his own ordination which took place in Caesarea in the last months of 302 A.D.

At the time of Trdat's baptism there was no other Christian king. But we must say, for the sake of historical accuracy, that another king, Abgar IX of Osrhoene, had been baptized and had abolished the pagan cults in his land, some seventy years earlier. But Osrhoene, which was a small country to the southwest of Armenia, knew no historical continuity. About two years after the establishment of Christianity there, the land was occupied by the Roman Caracalla and the kingdom of Osrhoene never again recovered its autonomy. Thus Armenia is the first Christian state which *has kept its identity through the centuries*.

A most important date in the history of Christianity is 313. In that year the celebrated Edict of Milan was issued jointly by Constantine and Licinius who governed, respectively, the western and eastern parts of the Roman empire. The second and fourth clauses of that important document read as follows: "When we, Constantine and Licinius, Emperors, met at Milan in conference concerning the welfare and security of the realm, we decided that of the things that are of profit to all mankind, the worship of God ought rightly to be our first and chiefest care, and that it was right that Christians and all others should have

freedom to follow the kind of religion they favored; so that the God who dwells in heaven might be propitious to us and to all under our rule. We therefore announce that, notwithstanding any provisions concerning the Christians in our former instructions, all who choose that religion are to be permitted to continue therein, without any let or hindrance, and are not to be in any way troubled or molested."

At the date of the issuance of this document neither Licinius nor Constantine were Christians. Constantine himself favored Christianity to the point of dedicating the city of Byzantium to the Holy Mother of God and he made it the capital of his empire. This took place around 325 A.D. He then called it Constantinople after his own name. He also adopted a standard (or flag) bearing the letters XP (the first Greek letters of CHRist"). This standard is known as the *labarum*, and the monogram XP is used to this day on many religious objects. It is possible to maintain that Constantine favored Christianity not out of personal conviction, but for reasons of political expediency. He himself was baptized on his deathbed in 331.

From 361 to 363 the emperor Julian (called "the Apostate") tried to reestablish paganism. And it was only Theodosius, emperor from 379 to 395, who finally wrote: "It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue in the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the Divine Apostle Peter, as it hath been preserved by faithful tradition." The letter containing this excerpt was issued some 80 years after Trdat had given similar instructions in Armenia. In our Divine Liturgy (*Patarag*) we mention the Christian kings "saints Abgar, Constantine, Trdat, Theodosius" in that order. This Abgar is presumably not Abgar IX mentioned above, but Abgar Uchama of Osrhoene (capital, Edessa) who reigned from 4 B.C. to 7 A.D. and from 13 to 50 A.D. He is said to have sent a letter to Jesus asking him to come to Edessa and to heal him of a grave sickness. Jesus, the legend continues, did not go to Edessa but wrote back saying that he would send a disciple. The text of the imaginary letter of Jesus—"Blessed art thou who didst believe in me [according to what is written concerning me. After being] taken up to him who sent me, . . . I will send to thee one of my disciples to heal thy suffering and give life to thee and those with thee"—is significant because it shows the antiquity of the tradition that Christianity was brought to Armenia by an apostle.

Our great Trdat has the distinction of having led the first *army*, in the history of the world, which fought for Christ. The historian Eusebius writes as follows: "That tyrant (Emperor Maximinus, who died in 314) fought also against the Armenians, the people who from the beginning were friendly and helpful toward the Romans. Seeing that they are Christians and show great zeal in piety, the tyrant began to oppress them and forced them to sacrifice to idols and demons, and thus he set up against himself enemies instead of friends, and warriors instead of allies . . . but along with his armies he was beaten many times in his wars against the Armenians."

We must not suppose that as the result of the conversion of Trdat every Armenian in the land became a Christian and a model of Christian charity. Paganism was still rampant in many parts of the land and many *nakharars* opposed violently the religion of love. Understandably enough, they saw in it a threat to their unrestrained ambitions. The strong and wise rule of Trdat kept the many *nakharars* loyal to himself. But during the weaker reign of his son and successor Khosrov Cotac, acts of insubordination tended to disorganize the kingdom. A courageous general of this period was Vatché Mamiconian who put down many rebellions. He died in a battle against the Persians in 339. The energy and courage of Vatché and of his distinguished comrades-in-arms counterbalanced the lack of leadership in Khosrov Cotac. We may note that the uncomplimentary nickname of Cotac was given to him because he was small in size; his height is given as four feet and six inches.

Aristakess and Werthaness, with whom our story deals, were the sons of Gregory the Enlightener. Aristakess was a monk in Caesarea when he was prevailed upon to come to Armenia as an assistant to his father. The story is told that some years later—as he was journeying to Nicea as a representative of the Armenian church at the council held in that city in 325—some villagers, noticing that he looked more like a peasant than a bishop, mockingly invited him to open furrows in the nearby sea. Aristakess was unperturbed and drove the oxen and the plough right on to it. He then politely invited the villagers to go and sow the seeds! This apocryphal tale indicates the sanctity of his life. Aristakess was martyred by Archelaus, the chieftain of the province of Dzop (or Sophene) in 333.

As to Werthaness, he died eight years later during the early years of the reign of Tiran, the son and successor of Khosrov Cotac.

CHRISTIANITY GROWS IN ARMENIA

(THE STORIES OF SAINT ARISTAKESS AND SAINT WERTHANESS)

One of the most important towns of ancient Cappadocia was Caesarea. It is known today as Kayseri, and is not nearly so beautiful as it was when Aristakess, the younger son of Saint Gregory the Enlightener, was born there in 264. Caesarea was at an important crossroads and naturally all the rich merchants who passed through it spent there a great deal of money. It was a rich town. The streets were lined with large houses with marble columns; there were gardens on top of many stoneworks; if one looked at them from a distance, one would think that these gardens were hanging in mid-air.

Tourists used to come to Caesarea for pleasure; but the native people were hard workers. They were strong-willed people. There was a saying at the time that when a snake bites a Cappadocian, the Cappadocian does not die, but the snake does. The merchants of Cappadocia knew how to bargain, and the good Christians knew how to live a Christian life, no matter how difficult. There were among them many who were very learned and very famous.

Aristakess grew up in this country of stern people, in the beautiful town of Caesarea, but he never dreamed of living in one of its palaces. On the contrary, all he wanted was to deserve the love of God.

Aristakess lived a very austere life. He never ate meat; he wore clothes made of coarse and hard material; he never slept on a mattress. He slept very little anyway; he spent as much time as possible learning about God, about the church and about the world. When he was completely exhausted, he would lie down on the bare floor. Gradually he became so famous that many people came to him in order to learn about the Christian

religion. He had been a monk for a long time, and now he formed his own order of monks. Every so often he would receive news from his father and he would give thanks to God for the conversion of Armenia to Christianity. He had seen his father when the latter had come to Caesarea to be consecrated a bishop.

Aristakess was now sixty years old and still a vigorous man. One day he was sitting alone in his cell reading the Bible when a young monk knocked at his door. The young monk told Aristakess that some people had come from Armenia and wanted to see him.

“Let them in,” said Aristakess gladly.

“We come,” said the visitors, “on behalf of His Majesty the great king of Armenia, on behalf of Catholico Gregor, your venerable father, and on behalf of the people of the land. Your father is now well advanced in years and he has much work to do. He has to travel and preach the gospel in the far corners of the land; he has to govern the Armenian church; he has to supervise the building of new churches; he has to sit in meetings with the officials of the palace and see to it that the bishops and priests are treated respectfully; he has to establish schools and prepare teachers who will be able to teach the Christian religion; he has to see to it that the services are performed according to tradition and correctly; he has to make laws for the government of the church and the conduct of the people; he has to perform the sacraments and ordain new priests. And he has to receive scores of visitors every day, talk to each one individually, and try to help them in doing what is best. All this is too much work for him,” the visitors went on, “and His Majesty the king, your venerable father, and the people of the land think that no one is better qualified to help the catholico than you.”

Aristakess fell into deep thought. He was thinking of his simple and quiet life here in the mountains of Cappadocia; of all the time that he had here to pray, meditate and teach. And then he thought of all the trouble he would have if he went to Armenia, dealing with the officials of the palace, becoming involved in useless arguments, wasting his time in endless meet-

ings. Aristakess was a true Christian and it would be difficult for him to deal with people who were Christians by name but not in their hearts. He knew that he would speak the truth even if it hurt people, and he felt that perhaps something tragic was in store for him. He knew that many people did not love truth as much as he did.

The visitors perhaps knew what was in his thoughts. "It is better for you to work for God among your people, than be in this monastery," they said.

Aristakess smiled. He felt that his duty was now to go and work side by side with his father. He knew that God was asking him to serve Him to the end. He gathered the few things he had and put them in a small bag. He took his Bible and his other books. A carriage was waiting for him outside.

Some time after the arrival of Aristakess in Armenia, there was a great meeting held in a far away town called Nicaea. This was an important meeting. All the great bishops of the world would be gathered there in order to make decisions on certain teachings of the church. No one was better qualified to represent the Armenian church at this meeting than Aristakess who was now a bishop, having been ordained and consecrated by his father. He went to Nicaea, took part in the discussions and brought back to Armenia with him a text which all the bishops had signed. This text contained the most important truths of the Christian religion. It is known as the Creed. Saint Gregory read it to the people in Armenia and then he said solemnly: "As for us we shall glorify him who was before the ages, worshipping the Holy Trinity and the one Godhead, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."

Toward the last years of his life Saint Gregory used to go off to the mountains to pray there by himself. Sometimes he would be gone for several months at a time. His son Aristakess did more and more of his father's work, until one day people learned through some shepherds that Saint Gregory had died. Then Aristakess himself became Catholicos of Armenia.

The new catholicos did not spare his words and fought very hard against all sins, against vice and crime. He wanted the officers of the army and the magistrates of the land to treat the people kindly.

There was one *nakharar* in particular whom Catholicos Aristakess chastised strongly because he would go about robbing other people's properties and making other people work for him without wages. He had respect neither for men nor for women. The catholicos invited him many times to mend his ways, but he would not listen. Instead, he held a grudge against the head of the church. He was such a bad man that he automatically thought of good people as his enemies. His name was Archelaus. He was the nakharar of the province of Sophene (or *Dzop*). One day, when Catholicos Aristakess had gone to Sophene to visit his people, Archelaus hid behind a tree with murder in his mind, and as the catholicos was passing him, he jumped on him like a mad beast from his hiding place. The devil was in him.

Saint Aristakess died with a prayer on his lips.

The news of the ghastly crime spread across Armenia like a black cloud. People lamented the death of their beloved, saintly catholicos, but they did not despair. They knew that God would never let His church be defeated by evil people. Whenever a soldier for Christ leaves this earth, there is another to take his place, they thought. And so the people of Armenia turned hopefully to the brother of Aristakess who was then seventy-one years of age.

Old age did not prevent Bishop Werthaness from assuming the heavy responsibility of the office of catholicos, and his decision was a blessing for Armenia. Catholicos Werthaness had held high positions in the palace and knew what to do when any kind of danger threatened the country. At the time the king of Armenia was Khosrov Cotac, the son of Trdat the Great. Khosrov could not do without the help of Catholicos Werthaness and they ruled the country together. There were many important

decisions to make because the Persians were preparing to attack Armenia and they were a mighty nation.

One day the news reached the palace that numerous Persian hordes were marching on Armenia. The king and the catholicos sent against the enemy one of the most illustrious soldiers of Armenia: Vatche Mamiconian. Under his command the Armenians gained a brilliant victory. But the major concern of the catholicos was always the church. There were still a great many people in Armenia who needed instruction. Some had not even heard of Christianity after all these years. The catholicos needed a better and more efficient organization. He sent learned people to Jerusalem, to see what was being done in the other churches of the world. The patriarch of that city was glad to put his knowledge at the service of the Armenian catholicos.

Saint Werthaness served God and the Armenian people for eight years. His headquarters was at Etchmiadzin, but he rarely stayed there. He went wherever he was needed, wherever the gospel must be preached. He died away from home, at the age of seventy-nine. People from all over the land went to bring his body in a great procession to the village of Thordan. There he was buried. There too the relics of his father, Saint Gregory, were brought from the mountain where he had lived the last years of his life.

Introduction to Story VII

The two bishops whose story will be told in this section had tragic deaths. The political background against which these deaths occurred constitutes a sad page of the history of Armenia. The center of the stage is occupied by a ruler, Tiran, who is one of the most unfortunate and pitiable characters of history. Khosrov Cotac did not have, as we saw, the strength of character, the profound convictions and the political acumen of his father, Trdat III. Khosrov's son, Tiran, was considerably worse. He was a weak and indecisive person; yet he hankered after power, and his royal fantasies resulted in senseless cruelty. He lived off the prosperity bequeathed to him by his father and grandfather, and he squandered it for his personal pleasures. He was badly punished and brought low in the end and for this reason alone may we have some sympathy for him. Tiran was not, therefore, a model of virtue. He had Catholicos Houssic beaten to death. Then he expediently chose to exhibit signs of regret in order to pacify the people who were aroused to open anger at such a crime against a direct descendant of Saint Gregory. To replace Houssic, he gave his prompt consent to the appointment of a bishop who had been close to Saint Gregory. However, when this bishop, Daniel by name, scolded the king for his crime, he had him drowned. The vacant see of catholicos was then occupied by Bishop Parenn who had the people's sympathy because he was a saintly man. He was much too old, however, to rebuke the king with any degree of effectiveness. Tiran also attempted to wipe out two influential families which did not favor his reign, though his opponents were fortunate in that his success in this bloody venture was never complete.

Tiran's lack of statesmanship was particularly deplorable, because, even for a man of average virtue and ability, the situation was hard to cope with. The country needed a man of outstanding stature, but the ruler it happened to have was a total misfit. It was during Tiran's reign

that one of Armenia's most formidable enemies came into prominence. This enemy was Shapur II, the Sassanian.

Shapur II did not *become* a king. He was *born* one. Of his three brothers one had been killed by the Persian magnates, one was blinded and the third was thrown into jail. Waiting for Shapur II to come of age, his mother and the magnates ruled the Persian empire. It is quite likely that they would have liked to continue doing so, but Shapur proved to be an ambitious, strong-willed and ruthless monarch. He has been described as "a monster of perfidy and cruelty." He was a religious fanatic. He wanted to have a complete collection of Mazdeistic scriptures and thus what is known as the "Avesta" came into being. His religious fanaticism was an added reason for his savage attitude against the Roman empire, whose first Christian emperor, Constantine, died in 337. Shapur was then twenty-seven years old.

Before his death Constantine had divided his empire among his three sons: Constantine II, Constans and Constantius. Shapur thought the time had come to launch an attack against the Roman empire, and thus, in 337, a war began between the two empires, bringing to an end an uneasy peace of forty years. (This peace had been concluded in 297 between the Roman Diocletian and the Persian Narses. It had made possible in Armenia the prosperous reign of Trdat the Great, followed by that of Khosrov Cotac.)

The theatre of military operations between the Romans and Persians was Mesopotamia, the land "between two rivers," the Tigris on the east and the Euphrates on the west. For these military operations spring was, of course, the best season of the year. For the next thirteen years, as the new buds appeared on the trees and nature as a whole began to show signs of renewal and resurrection, the Persians would come west of the Tigris, the Romans would cross the Euphrates toward the east; they would meet halfway between the two rivers and viciously slaughter each other. The fortresses of Nisibin and Singara were the keys to victory. The Roman emperor Constantius was usually beaten, even though the Persians were not strong enough to occupy the area permanently. Around the year 350 there was a temporary cessation of hostilities. Shapur welcomed it because there were troubles on the eastern frontiers of his empire and he had to send heavy reinforcements there. Constantius himself welcomed this lull in the fighting for similar reasons. It must be said that the situation on the whole ended

favorably for the Persians. The Romans could no longer evince their usual tenacity and military superiority.

Along with Mesopotamia, Armenia was also of course of great strategic importance. Shapur had been making efforts for some time now, to occupy Armenia at the least possible cost to himself, namely by winning to his side enough Armenian magnates who would eventually revolt against their pro-Roman king and turn the country over to the Persians. King Tiran had received his crown from the Roman emperor; but as the Persians began to have the upper hand in their contest with the Romans, he began to pay taxes to the Persians. Tiran never had a clear-cut policy. He wanted to keep both sides happy, and won the friendship of neither. Then an incident which in itself is woefully insignificant, precipitated the end.

The historian Faustus of Byzantium reports that a henchman of Shapur II, Prince Baraz-Shapur of Azerbaijan, had fallen in love with Tiran's horse and had expected the Armenian king to give the animal to him as a present. Reluctant to part with his favorite horse, Tiran found one that was in all respects similar to it and sent it to Baraz-Shapur as if it were the very horse on which the prince had set his heart. The prince did not notice the difference. But shady characters are not lacking in the world. One such character, Bisac Sewny, reported Tiran's compromise to Baraz-Shapur. Thereupon the Azerbaijani brute invited the king to a banquet. He plied him with wine. He forced his wife, son and attendants to surrender as prisoners, then he proceeded to heat a bar of iron. When it was red hot, they used it to burn out the king's eyes. This happened at the village of Dalaris. It had the blessing of Shapur II, Persia's "king of kings."

Tiran had not been on good terms with Catholicos Werthaness who died during his reign. He could fare no better, as we saw, with Houssic, Werthaness' son and successor, and his own brother-in-law.

Our story relates the tragic deaths of Grigoris and Houssic, grandchildren of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. The circumstances under which they died show a certain tension in Christian Armenia between the church and the state. The church was not, as it were, a department of the government. It was not subservient to the state. This subservience is known as "caesaro-papism" and it existed largely in the Byzantine empire. There was no caesaro-papism in Armenia, even if the king's will was at times imposed upon the church through sheer physical force.

THE TWIN MARTYRS

(THE STORY OF SAINT GRIGORIS AND
SAINT HOUSSIC)

The great king Trdat of Armenia was walking one day down the great hall of the palace. He was accompanied by several important guests from Rome. Suddenly two young boys darted out from between two side columns and ran straight toward him. As a rule no one was allowed to disturb His Majesty under any circumstances, but upon seeing the boys, the king did not frown at all. On the contrary, he extended his strong arms and welcomed each in turn. Then he turned to his guests and introduced the boys.

"They are twins," he said. And then, pointing to the taller of the two, "*his* name is Grigoris; he has the same name as his grandfather. Only we call him Grigoris instead of Gregory because we shall always think of him as a *grandson*. And *he* is Houssic," the king continued, looking at the other brother. "They are wonderful boys," he said.

"They are wonderful boys!" said all the guests at once, not only because they wanted to please the king, but also because the two boys had beautiful eyes and looked very intelligent. The king told his purse-carrier to give a piece of gold to each and sent them off to the field.

"Come," said Houssic to his brother, "let's go and practice archery!"

"No," said Grigoris. "We have to go and recite our Greek lessons to the teacher."

"But the *king* told us to go and play," Houssic argued.

"If the king *knew* that we had lessons to do, he would not have told us to!" Grigoris said.

The two boys went home. A private teacher was waiting for them.

There were no public schools in Armenia at that time. In fact, there were no public schools anywhere in the world. Most children never learned to read and write. They would learn to do well what their fathers did, and would grow up to be tradesmen, skilled workers, farmers or soldiers. Only the sons of noblemen and those who were to become priests used to receive an education.

Grigoris and Houssic knew two or three languages. They liked the stories of the Bible. They had learned about the great prophets of the Old Testament. They admired them because they were courageous and served God in the face of great difficulties. Grigoris and Houssic read also about the martyrs of the church. Sometimes they would lie awake at night and wonder about them. These martyrs had only to say that they did not believe in Jesus Christ, and they would not have been thrown to the lions. But they did not deny their belief. They preferred to die. That was strange. The boys wondered if they themselves would ever have enough courage to live and die like the martyrs. Sometimes while in bed the two brothers would start talking about these things and then their father would tell them to go to sleep. The boys did not know, nor did their father Werthaness, that the day would come when they themselves would be martyrs!

Grigoris never married. He was ordained a priest when he was still very young. Then he became a helper and a secretary to his uncle Aristakess. He had a great admiration for this holy man and tried to be like him in all things.

One day a group of horsemen appeared in Val'arshapat. They were messengers from the north of Armenia and wanted to see the catholicos and the king. An audience was granted to them without delay and the messengers presented their case. They said that they needed a bishop for their province. The king listened intently, stroking his beard.

"I thought you had a bishop already," he said in his deep voice.

"Yes, Your Majesty," replied the messengers. "But our tribe

and other northern tribes are not very civilized. We would like to have a bishop whom everybody will respect. In short," the messengers went on, "we want a descendant of Catholicos Gregory. He is so well known and so much admired that no one would create any trouble if his grandson, for example, came to be the head of the church in our province."

The catholicos and the king dismissed the messengers and held a conference together. They were both thinking of the same person; he was young, intelligent and devoted. Grigoris was consecrated a bishop and soon afterwards left for the northern provinces of Armenia.

Bishop Grigoris did not stay long in any one place. As soon as he established one church he would move on, to establish another. He travelled farther and farther north until he found himself among wild soldiers and horsemen. The head of their army was a warrior called Sanatrouc-Sanessian. At first they listened with some interest to what Bishop Grigoris had to say. He spoke to them about the creation of the world, about the coming of Jesus Christ and about the way they should believe in Him in order to go to heaven. The wild soldiers and horsemen thought these were interesting stories. But then Bishop Grigoris proceeded to tell them how they must change their ways in order really to deserve the name of Christian. He told them first about the ten commandments: "you must not kill . . . you must not steal . . ." He spoke to them about loving their enemies. This, to the wild soldiers, was the most unnatural thing they had heard in their lives. "We must love our enemies?" they asked and looked at each other. One of them stood up. It was easy to see that he was disturbed and angry. "If we do not steal and kill and take other people's things," he shouted, "how are we going to live?"

"Why," said another, "we would even forget how to ride horses!" They all laughed so loudly that even the horses joined in and neighed and pounded the ground with their right forelegs.

In vain did Bishop Grigoris try to calm them. The soldiers grew wilder and wilder and, growling and shouting profanities,

they ran in every direction. Sanessian could have stopped these men, who had gone utterly mad, with a single order. Instead, he made matters much worse. He turned to his aide: "Perhaps," he said, "the bishop is trying to get us not to fight, so we won't attack his king." Sanessian said this because he was an enemy of the king of Armenia, and his aide was dull enough to believe him. The rumor spread like wildfire. The horsemen's eyes glared with hatred. They had become so many demons. They picked out the fiercest of their fierce horses, tied the holy man to its tail and let the horse go.

The stones and the grass of the fields of Armenia were stained with the blood of Saint Grigoris. When the angels received his soul to make a place for him among the saints of heaven, Saint Grigoris was praying in his agony that his death be not in vain.

Grigoris's brother Houssic was also a saint. Like his father Werthaness and his grandfather Gregory the Enlightener, he too had been married. His wife was the sister of King Tiran of Armenia. Tiran was the grandson of King Trdat the Great but he himself was not a great king at all. The man who wrote the story of his life tells us that he was far from being good. He was, he says, "lawless, immoral, bloodthirsty, merciless and a robber." His sister was not much better than he and together they made the life of Houssic very miserable. Nor was she a good mother. She did not live long. Her twin children grew up to be wicked and useless. They wasted away their lives and were struck down by lightning one day in the midst of their usual drinking and merrymaking.

Houssic was forty-six years old when his father Werthaness died. His wife, the king's sister, had died some twenty-five years earlier and his brother Grigoris had been martyred on the northern frontiers of Armenia about four years before the death of their father. At that time Houssic was not a bishop. He was not even a priest. And yet, because he was a learned man who had spent many years in prayer and meditation, people turned to him when they needed a new catholicos. He was a direct de-

scendant of Saint Gregory the Enlightener and that, too, mattered very much at the time.

Great preparations were made for his journey to Caesarea where he went to be ordained and consecrated a bishop. Even greater was the joy of the people upon his return to Armenia. The king himself went a long distance to meet him and he was made Catholicos of the Armenian Church with great solemnity.

There was a short period of good will between the king and the catholicos. But it soon became clear that the king had no intention of living a good life, or of being mindful of the good of the country. Catholicos Houssic began openly to condemn the evil ways of the ruler of the land, and forbade him even to enter the church in his sinful state. The king knew himself to be guilty, but he would not admit it. Instead, even more evil thoughts flooded his mind.

One Sunday in the year 347 the king came to church, prepared. He did not come in order to worship God. He had an evil intention. As he approached, he found the catholicos at the door of the church. The catholicos faced the king, he faced the armed men behind him and he said: "I know that you are not coming as a sinful man to ask pardon of God and to worship Him. You are a king, but in God's sight you are no different from any other man. Since you do not even try to live a decent life, you are not worthy and I have forbidden you to set foot inside God's house." The king took a step forward.

"Do not come inside!" said the catholicos, his open hands raised towards heaven. He was determined to keep the church as a place of worship and not of royal pride. The king had recourse to the only means available to him to have his way. He ordered his men to beat the catholicos. They blindly followed his orders and beat the saint to death.

Some years later, King Tiran's eyes were burned out by a still stronger king who had more soldiers than Tiran had ever commanded.

Introduction to Story VIII

We have already spoken about the representation of the Armenian church by Saint Aristakess at the Council of Nicaea. The very fact that such a council was held at all indicates in the life of the church certain developments of crucial significance. These developments deserve, therefore, special attention. And we cannot turn our attention to this particular period in the life of the church without seeing in the background a figure of colossal dimensions: that of Saint Athanasius. This saint was born in or near Alexandria around 298 and died there in 387. He seldom lived in peace. The saying “great men shall be greatly tormented” applies to him without reservation.

The Council of Nicaea was held in the year 325. We may remember that at the time the Edict of Milan had been in effect for twelve years. These were, for the church, years of trial, years of adjustment to the new situation. The passage of the church from a state of hostility and persecution to one of freedom and friendliness—though joyful—held, nonetheless, many dangers. Perhaps the greatest of these was the danger of subservience to the state.

Evidently the Council of Nicaea could never have taken place without imperial consent. It is clear, on the other hand, that it was not a genuine interest in the different religious views, which were spreading from Alexandria to the different parts of the empire, that led the emperor to favor such a meeting. The fact is that having already had his brother-in-law executed, Constantine was now sole emperor, and, acute statesman that he was, he sensed that his authority was not so firm as he wished it to be. If the Christians were divided into many parties due to their different ideas about their God, such a division would only weaken the empire and hasten its break-up. To get the bishops to agree was a way of making use of their influence in the different areas of the empire in order to maintain its unity. The motivation of the emperor in granting or withdrawing his support to or from any movement or cause was of decisive importance; in many

instances a particular person or cause would triumph or go down in defeat merely through someone's ability to take the issue to the emperor; and the emperor, in deciding the issue, would of course be guided by considerations of his own. In a word, the church faced the danger of secularization.

It was customary in the ancient world to give the ministers of the official religion extensive lands and to provide them with a substantial slice of the state's income. This practice still continues in some countries and it was, of course, in full effect in the time of Constantine. But this emperor made a special point of making his gifts to the church exceed all expectations. His generosity in making grants for the building of churches and monasteries and for the decoration of these churches was without parallel. The managers of all this wealth could amass a considerable wealth of their own. Some of the bishops were not particularly scrupulous and they would have no qualms of conscience in exploiting the credulous piety of the people. As a result of all these worldly blessings which poured from the imperial treasury, the holding of ecclesiastical orders and functions became a matter of fierce competition. Christian ministry no longer involved hardship and risk and it became increasingly rare to find bishops for whom it was a matter of irresistible vocation. This is not to say that there were no selfless ones after the persecutions. It does mean, however, that with recognition and wealth came an increase of moral laxity. Free relationships with the pagans resulted in the adoption of some of the pagan practices. Christianity did not put an end to the old order without inheriting something of it.

To these political, moral and social consequences of the liberation of Christianity we must add another very important one. People began to speculate about Christ with a certain leisure. Rather than being eager to be *saved* through Christ, many theologians engaged in propaganda to push their own speculations regarding His person. Now that there was religious tolerance, such propaganda became possible.

There were, roughly speaking, two ways of understanding Christ. One was to *explain* Him to oneself. The other was to *come into contact* with Him with one's whole being. Only the second way is the authentic Christian way. For a true Christian the Incarnation, that is, God's becoming Man in Jesus Christ, is a mystery. He knows Christ not only with his mind, but also in his soul, in his spirit and in his heart. He knows that Christ is God, because it has been so revealed. Some

learned people ignored the value of revelation; they tried to understand Christ with their minds alone. Instead of feeling the need of Christ and living in and with Him, they tried to explain Christ to themselves. Christ was a “problem” to them rather than the Way, the Truth and the Life. Chief among these wayward theologians was Arius. To him Christ was not God and therefore Creator, but a creature, that is, a created agent. His teaching was condensed in the formula: “there was a time when the Son was not.”

The main business on the agenda of the Council of Nicaea was to show to the world that the teaching of Arius was wrong, although that was not the only problem that the council considered. Arius was a learned presbyter and skillful in debate. He had won to his side several bishops. Opposing the Arians there was at the Council of Nicaea a deacon, as learned and skillful as Arius, and towering above him in his zeal and the depth and sincerity of his faith: Athanasius. Although a deacon, he presumably did address this council of bishops. He attended the council in his capacity as secretary to Alexander, the anti-Arian, orthodox bishop of Alexandria.

If Christ is a creature, argued Athanasius, then we cannot be saved through Him, for to be saved is to be brought closer to God, it is to be reconciled with Him; and this cannot be achieved through a *creature*. It is this conviction which informs the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

It is sometimes said that the fourth century controversy between the orthodox and the Arians was over an iota. The allusion is to the difference between the Greek words *homoi-ousion* and *homo-ousion*. The former, used by the Arians, describes Christ as “of like substance” with the Father. *Homo-ousion*, used more and more frequently by Athanasius as his convictions gained general support, describes Christ as “of one substance with (the Father).” Without insistence on this point the validity of the doctrine regarding the Holy Trinity would have been jeopardized: “*One Substance (Ousia), Three Persons.*”

Athanasius cannot be accused of being bent on martyrdom, but he had a hard road to travel because he never sacrificed integrity and truth to his personal comfort. A study of his life amounts to a study of the greater part of the fourth century. With uncommon perspicacity he sensed the dangers which threatened the church as she emerged from the period of persecutions, and he was always ready to sacrifice his life in her defense.

A CHAMPION OF THE TRUE FAITH

(THE STORY OF SAINT ATHANASIUS)

There was a time when children could not own books, as they do today. Books were very rare. There were few people who could write books and not many who could read them. And there were not many copies of the same book because there were no printing houses and each book had to be copied by hand. Even professors did not have all the books they wanted and sometimes they had to travel great distances in order to find a particular volume. Among all the great towns of the Roman empire there was just one where people were sure to find any book they wanted. That town was Alexandria. This town also had the best and biggest museum as well as the best and biggest theatre. Alexandria had the best and biggest of nearly everything that people could want in the big towns of that time.

For many hundreds of years before and after Jesus, there were in Alexandria famous schools with a famous teacher at the head of each. Some of these teachers were Christians and the things that they said and wrote are important to this day. They read the Bible many times over and corresponded about its contents with other learned Christians around the world. They sometimes went wherever their learned friends were and talked with them in person. Most important of all, they *thought* a great deal; and then they wrote down the results of their thinking, or they gave lectures or preached sermons in the churches. The greatest Christian man of Alexandria who became famous in this way is Saint Athanasius. This saint did not write as much as some of the other natives of his town; he did not write too many books because, for one thing, he had no time. He was about twenty years old when he wrote his first two

books. After that, the story of his life is the story of one long battle against the enemies of the church. One of the books he wrote is called "Against the Heathen." It is written against those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. The second book which he wrote in his early youth is likewise about Christ. It shows that Jesus Christ is Man and God at the same time. Much later Athanasius wrote another book that many millions of people have read ever since. Great artists have painted scenes from it. This book is the first one of its kind: it is what we call *Christian biography*, that is, the story of the life of a saint. It is the story of the life of Saint Antony who was a rich young man. The parents of Saint Antony died when he was eighteen or twenty years old. One day he went to church and there he heard a passage from the Bible. It said: "If you will be perfect, go and sell all that you have, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven." Saint Antony was a man who did nothing half-way. He went and sold all he had, gave some of the money to his sister, most of it to the poor and went to live in the desert. The devil tried many times as hard as he could to get Saint Antony to sin against God, but the saint was always victorious. In the end he was so courageous that he did not fear anything, anymore.

There was no one in the world whom Saint Athanasius loved and respected as much as he loved and respected Saint Antony. In his book about him he tells us of the strange noises that Saint Antony once heard. "It was as though there was an earthquake, as though demons were breaking through the four walls of the room. The demons were disguised as wild beasts and serpents. All of a sudden the place became full of ghostly lions, bears, leopards, bulls, snakes, scorpions and wolves, and each moved according to the shape it had. The lion roared and made ready to jump; the bull seemed about to make an end of him. The snake coiled but could not reach him, and the wolf was leaping but stopped in mid-air. The noises these ghostly animals made were hideous, and they were terribly angry . . . yet Antony lay there watching and there was no fear in his

soul." Through the love of Christ, says Saint Athanasius, Saint Antony had become absolutely fearless. That is why he loved him so much and wrote a book to tell us about the adventures of this saint.

Saint Athanasius himself was a fearless man. He was fearless in his spirit, even though he was very small in size. He had a dark skin, a reddish beard, a small mouth and small but sparkling eyes. His enemies made fun of him, but everybody had to respect his unusual energy, his character and his brilliant mind.

Shortly after Saint Athanasius wrote his two books a heresy began to be taught in Alexandria. A heresy is a wrong teaching. Wrong teachings are destructive, and the wrong teaching that began to be taught in Alexandria could very well destroy the church. This heresy was like one of the ghostly animals that Saint Antony had seen in his bad dream. It was a dangerous thing. Saint Athanasius decided to fight it. At times it seemed to most people that he would lose the battle. But the saint himself never lost courage. In the end he was victorious and almost all by himself he saved the church with the help of God.

The most important occasion on which Athanasius met his opponent, and the opponent of the church, was at Nicaea. Very few people would have known today that such a village ever existed, were it not for the meeting that was held there when Saint Athanasius was a deacon of about twenty-seven years of age. The emperor himself was there, wearing red shoes reaching half-way to the knees, and a silken robe of purple color covered with glittering precious stones. The emperor called this meeting the "Great and Holy Synod." He had called eighteen hundred bishops to take part in it. Some of those invited were sick; others could not come for one reason or another. But the issue was so important that close to three hundred bishops endured the difficulties of travel in those times and attended. Some historians say that there were exactly three hundred and eighteen bishops. One of them, Saint Aristakess, had come from as far away as Armenia.

The meeting was held in a large hall surrounded by columns instead of walls. Each bishop was sitting in a wooden armchair; each had two secretaries (who were priests) and three servants. In the middle of the hall there was a throne but no one was sitting on it. It was there in order to remind everyone that the unseen God was in their midst. An open Bible was placed on the empty throne. The emperor himself was sitting on another throne at one end of the hall. After a speech of welcome addressed to him by a bishop, the emperor said: "It is my desire that you should meet together in a general council, and so I offer to the King of All my gratitude for his mercy which has come to me above my other mercies—I mean that I have been given the privilege of seeing you assembled together and to know that you are resolved to be in harmony with each other." Then he asked for an open stove. He tossed into the fire some letters that he had received from certain individuals. He did this in order to show that he was going to be impartial. Now the meeting was open. Discussions began at once and at one point there was so much disorder that the emperor had to intervene. He gave the floor to the formidable opponent of Saint Athanasius: a very serious-looking, tall and lanky presbyter (or priest) who was smart enough to have won many followers. His name was Arius. His followers were known as Arians.

Arius began to speak and when he saw, at one point, that the emperor was showing signs of boredom, he began to sing. The emperor was somewhat amused although he could not follow the fine points of the argument. But the bishops of the true faith were following Arius closely; and when he denied that Jesus Christ was eternal God, they were so shocked that they covered their ears with their hands so as not to hear such blasphemy.

When Arius finished talking and singing, all eyes turned upon Athanasius. He was only a deacon and could not be an official speaker at a meeting where only bishops could speak. But they made an exception in his case. The council lasted seven weeks, and Athanasius spoke so well on every occasion

that those who followed the true faith gained a great victory.

Saint Athanasius' triumph at the Council of Nicaea was his greatest service to the church. Upon his return to Alexandria he was consecrated and became the chief bishop of that city. But his troubles did not come to an end. Whenever the Arians became strong, they would spread false rumors about him, they would tell lies to the emperor, and the emperor would have him exiled even though he had no guilt.

Once the emperor had to send more than five thousand armed soldiers to have Athanasius removed from his post. The saint was courageous enough not to leave his people every time the emperor ordered him to go. His people were also devoted to him and would defend him against the unjust orders of the emperor. Athanasius was praying in church when the five thousand men descended upon him with spears and swords. The monks, the priests and the faithful people formed a ring around the saint and would not let the soldiers, not even their commander, approach him. Many died in the battle, but they forced the soldiers to give up. Saint Athanasius fled to the desert. There he was safe because the monks of the desert were his most faithful friends. This was Athanasius' third exile. He was exiled five times altogether, and each time he kept up the good fight and came back to do his work for God, among his people.

Only the last seven years of the long life of Saint Athanasius were peaceful. He had been chief bishop of Alexandria for forty-six years and had seen sixteen emperors come and go during this period.

Introduction to Story IX

We made reference in our last story to the *Life of Antony*, a book written, according to many scholars, by Saint Athanasius. In his book Saint Athanasius says that “the sign of the solitary ascetics rules from one end of the earth to the other.” This sentence describes an important aspect of the life of the church in the fourth century.

The ascetic life did not begin in the fourth century, and it is not peculiar to Christianity. There were monastic communities before Christianity, such as the Essenes in Palestine. There were and still are monastic communities outside of Christianity: there are more Buddhist and other monks in some eastern countries than monks and nuns in the West.

Monasticism is a system of life which may be said to be *in*, but not *of*, the world. The word comes from the Greek *monos*, meaning “alone, only.” Now the obligation of being in, but not of, the world is a generally Christian precept. The monk, however, carries that precept a step further, as it were, and tries to reduce his being *in* the world to its bare minimum. He takes the vows of, or simply decides to practice, chastity, poverty and obedience.

Individual people are found everywhere and at all times who, for one reason or another, have decided to live apart from the world. We know that Saint Paul encouraged a life of celibacy devoted entirely to Jesus Christ and his service. But the monastic movement as such is said to have begun with Saint Antony who in 270 A.D. gave up his fortune and withdrew to the desert. Though this saint was not the only one to do so at the time, he probably was the first one whose fame spread wide enough throughout the Christian world to induce large numbers of people to follow him. As many of the solitaries went to the same area and lived in abandoned forts or in huts near each other, the idea naturally came to them to organize themselves into communities. The first person who did organize a monastic community was Saint Pachomius who died in 346 A.D. Both Saint Antony and Saint Pacho-

mius were Egyptians. Egypt is the cradle of the Christian monastic movement.

Next to Saint Pachomius the greatest founder of monasteries in the Eastern church is Saint Basil, a saint greatly revered by the fathers of the Armenian church. Saint Basil was born in Caesarea in about 329. His father was a rich lawyer and he himself was eventually appointed to the lucrative post of professor of rhetoric at the University of Athens. He left this position to visit the monks in Egypt. There he was greatly impressed by the monasteries organized according to principles set down by Saint Pachomius. But Saint Basil was a man of initiative and an original thinker. In his new monasticism, in Cappadocia, he combined the monastic life with works of charity and learning. The vast institution which he founded near the important city of Caesarea comprised a monastery, an elementary school, a hospital and a resting place for travellers. Daily midnight services, only one hour a day devoted to food (bread, water and vegetables), total obedience to the abbot were some of the requirements of the "rule" that regulated every minute of the monk's life.

The main contribution of Saint Basil to monasticism is thus to have combined the monastic life with works of charity. He made the monasteries socially useful, although this was very far from being their only purpose. He and the hero of our story were contemporaries. He also influenced our church as the champion of orthodoxy in the East (he focused attention not on words, but on beliefs), and as the author of one of the texts of our Divine Liturgy.

One cannot speak of monasticism without mentioning in the same breath St. Pachomius, St. Basil and St. Benedict. The last named was an Italian monk who established in 529 the order of the Benedictines which has given to the world some of its distinguished men of letters and of science. The cradle of the Benedictine order is the celebrated monastery of Monte Cassino. We may note in passing that the sister of Saint Benedict and the sisters of both St. Pachomius and St. Basil were nuns and founders of monasteries for women. There are reasons to believe that there were monasteries for women even before the ones organized by St. Pachomius for men.

With the example of Saint Basil before our eyes, it is easy to see that the interests and activities of Saint Nersess the Great, the Armenian catholicos, were not an isolated phenomenon. A traditional estimate puts the number of monasteries that *he* had built following the

trend of the times, at more than 2,000. Monasteries were in existence in Armenia since the time of Saint Gregory the Enlightener, but under the catholicate of Saint Nersess they received their first great impetus. We shall see in our story that the building of monasteries was accompanied by unprecedented works of charity. After the time of Saint Nersess monastic life in Armenia took severer forms. Many monks lived completely solitary lives on top of pillars following the example of Simeon Stylites who lived near Antioch and died in 460 A.D. Others isolated themselves in caves.

The catholicate of Saint Nersess lasted from 353 to 373. During this period Armenia continued to be an area where the power struggle between the Persian and the Roman empires left its tragic consequences. A romance marked with cruelty, and the founding of a celebrated town stand out in this period:

The heroine of the romance is Parantzem, a lady of great beauty. She was the wife of Gnel, a grandson of Tiran whom we met in Story VII. Gnel's cousin, Tirith, fell in love with Parantzem and in order to win her he induced King Arshac II to have her husband liquidated as a potential threat to the throne. Following Gnel's execution Arshac himself fell in love with Parantzem and had Tirith killed as a plotter; Arshac's Roman wife, Olompia, was poisoned to make room for Parantzem who thus became the queen. She then came to the attention of Shapur, Persia's "king of kings," but she seems to have been heroic enough to have refused to change her religion and become his concubine. She died an ignominious death after having had to surrender herself to Persian hordes who had laid a fourteen-month siege around the castle of Artacerk where she and her protectors had been fighting an unequal battle.

Arshac founded and named after himself Arshacavan, a town endowed with the right of asylum like the grove of Daphne near Antioch (see Story X). Soon criminals of all description flocked to it. Certain nakharars, opposed to Arshac, proceeded to destroy the city which had already been considerably ravaged by a severe plague. These nakharars were encouraged by ecclesiastical authorities.

Saint Nersess is said to have been poisoned by King Pap, Arshac's son from Olompia. Pap was not a particularly virtuous person and his relations with the church were far from friendly; but more recent historians do not think that he committed that crime.

HE LOVED HIS PEOPLE

(THE STORY OF SAINT NERSESS THE GREAT)

All the lords and princes of Armenia, as well as the higher officers of the army, were assembled at the palace of the king. They were wearing colorful capes and sandals. They were all talking eagerly to each other and the din was growing louder. Every so often there would be the metallic sound of two shields hitting each other. Most of the officials present were carrying shields on their left arms and were holding lances in their right hands. The noise of the sandals dragging on the marble floor made it even more difficult to hear the conversations, but at least one word could be made out. That word was the name of a young and important official of the palace: Nersess. This young official himself was among the crowd and he had a worried look. He knew what the others were saying about him and he did not seem to be pleased.

"What a pity! What a pity!" said a woman looking at him. "They are going to cut his beautiful hair, they are going to make him wear a black robe instead of his attractive military clothes . . ." But Nersess was not worried about his curly hair, nor was he particularly worried about his military apparel. The cause of his trouble was deeper. They wanted to make him a catholicos of the Armenian church and he did not feel he was qualified.

At last the king himself, Arshac II, came to the palace hall from his private quarters. He wore a dazzling white silk cape, clasped on the right shoulder with a golden buckle at the center of which shone a deep-red ruby. He had on his head his bejewelled crown. They all shouted greetings to him and when he occupied his throne, there was silence. Nersess stood behind the throne holding in his hand the sword of the king in its

golden sheath. He was a minister of court. He was given this responsible work in spite of his youth and he enjoyed great prestige. After a moment a delegation from among the distinguished audience came and wished to speak to the king:

“Your Majesty, may God grant you long life,” they said. “We beg you not to differ with us in our choice of Nersess, your minister of court, as Catholicos of all Armenians. He is the only living descendant of Gregory. The previous catholicos did not belong to the family of our enlightener and it is our sincere wish to have someone of the house of Gregory on the see of catholicos.”

The king had no objection, but Nersess himself came forward from behind the throne to say that the see of catholicos was a holy see, and that he, being a sinful man, was not worthy of it. He then proceeded to confess his sins. He was a humble man and was trying as hard as he could to make the people change their minds. All his efforts were useless.

“We take all your sins upon our own heads!” they shouted.

“I had a vision about you. God wants you to be our catholicos!” said Prince Pargev who belonged to the House of Gnounik.

Nersess kept refusing. He was ready and willing to serve God, but he wanted to do so in an obscure way. The memory of his father bothered him. Athanaginess had not been a virtuous man. He had died while drinking wine in bad company at the bishop’s residence near the capital of Armenia. Nersess wanted to do penance for his father and for himself. He did not want any reward for his exceptional qualities of intelligence and goodness, but the people insisted that he assume the highest office in the Armenian church. The king himself became impatient. He came down, took the royal sword from him and made it clear that he too wanted him to be the head of the church. A bishop ordained Nersess a deacon without delay. He was not even a chorister up to that time, and his hair had to be cut as required by the rite. Many wept as the abundant locks of his curly hair gradually covered the floor around him with each

stroke of the scissors. The rich clothes and the scintillating medals and jewels of the tall, brave, and handsome youth were soon taken away. He now wore a simple black robe down to his ankles. And yet a great joy came over the new deacon. He could see in the future the great works that he was going to do.

Nersess was consecrated bishop and catholicos within a few months. He did not know then that he was not going to live beyond his forty-fifth year. But in twenty years of office he changed Armenia so much and he served his people so well that the historians said of him: "never has there been another like him in the land of the Armenians."

Catholicos Nersess was a humble person as all truly great and learned men are. He was only twenty-five years old when he assumed his sacred functions; yet his learning, experience and piety at once won everybody's respect.

The first thing to do, he thought, was to hold a council or meeting of bishops. His purpose was to receive reports from the bishops about the condition of the country, and to discuss the new laws that ought to be passed in order to improve the condition of the church. This council was held in the year 354, at the town of Ashtishat. The council was the first of its kind in Armenia. Civilian notables were also asked to attend.

One day an attendant announced to Catholicos Nersess that two visitors awaited him. They were workers and were not sure whether the catholicos would have time to see them that day, but they were willing to wait. They were surprised when, before long, the head of the church came, eager to know if he could be of any help. The visitors said that they wanted to withdraw from the world in order to devote the rest of their lives to God, praying and serving other people.

"We have been to one or two monasteries already, and we were rejected. They told us they had no room," the visitors said.

The catholicos was familiar with this problem. Thousands of people, both men and women, had the same desire. Some were learned, some belonged to noble families, some were ordinary workers like the two visitors of that day. Many of them

did not even know how to read and write. They were different sorts of people, but they all wanted the same opportunity. They wanted peace, away from the busy, crowded and sinful cities. They did not want any of the pleasures of this world, but rather ample time to pray. They wanted to work and they were willing to obey a good abbot even when they did not like his orders. Most of the men and women who asked to be monks or nuns were devout, deeply religious people. Some of the applicants, a writer of those times tells us, were simply lazy folk who thought that life in a monastery was less complicated than life outside. These people were screened out as much as possible. Besides, the fact that there were dishonest applicants was no reason why good applicants should be deprived of communities of work and prayer. To accommodate all these people Catholicos Nersess built, in the course of the years, some two thousand forty monasteries.

Day and night Catholicos Nersess had a single preoccupation: how to make everyone a little happier. And of course his thought turned first of all to those who could not help themselves: to old people. For the first time in the history of our ancient country homes were built where old folk were fed and cared for. Similar homes were built for widows, orphans and poor people. Monks and nuns would come to help those who were helpless. The catholicos used his own properties and convinced many of the lords of Armenia to donate lands for the maintenance of such homes.

And there were the sick. St. Nersess built hospitals for them. One sickness in particular was horrible: leprosy. Running sores would appear all over the bodies of the lepers. Sometimes their nerves would be affected and they would gradually lose their ears, fingers, hands or feet. The lepers were very unpleasant to look at. They had to carry a bell around their necks while walking about in the streets so that people might hear them coming and run away. They were the most lonesome and the most unhappy people in the world. Catholicos Nersess received them in his own home and cared for them personally. He was a friend

of the poor, of the old and of the sick and was often seen eating with them around the same table.

Saint Nersess also built havens along the roads of Armenia as a resting place for travellers and as a protection against robbers. He founded schools. At the time there were no Armenian letters and Armenians had to write and read in Greek or Syriac. He established many church laws: close relatives should not marry each other; people could not hire women to put on a crying and wailing show at funerals; princes and employers should be kind to their subjects and employees. He improved the condition of the people so much and was such a good example of charity that he is known as the enlightener of the hearts of the Armenians.

Saint Nersess was a man of limitless courage. He did not hesitate to rebuke even the king for acts of injustice and cruelty and he stood like a giant against any danger that threatened the religion of the Armenian people. At the same time he was a very patriotic churchman. Once, as the Armenian army was fighting the invading Persians he and King Pap of Armenia, the successor of Arshac, stood at the top of Mount Nepat and prayed for victory. He had both arms raised to heaven and vowed not to take them down before the defeat of the enemy. This news reached the soldiers who were fighting under the command of one of the greatest soldiers that Armenia has ever known: Moushel' Mamiconian. The resolve of the catholicos made them even more valiant. They won a brilliant victory and the catholicos lowered his arms with a prayer of thanksgiving.

In 373 St. Nersess, now known as "the Great", attended a banquet given by King Pap. Suddenly he became ill. He reached his residence with difficulty and there he died.

Introduction to Story X

The “Byzantine” empire is a continuation of the Roman empire. This name has been applied to it from the time of Constantine who transferred his government to Byzantium (Constantinople) in 330 A.D. But beginning with the reign of Theodosius, who died in 395, the name applied only to the eastern dominions of the Roman empire. The language of the Byzantine empire was Greek and Christianity was its official religion except during the short reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363). The Byzantine empire came to an end in 1453.

The people of the Byzantine empire are sometimes referred to in Armenian literature as *Horoms*. “Horom” is a corruption of “Roman”, but does not quite mean Roman. It means Greek, or rather, a Greek-speaking citizen of the Byzantine empire. The historical circumstances mentioned above account for this linguistic peculiarity.

The Armenians were in the closest contact with the Greeks of the Byzantine empire for the obvious reason that Armenia lay just beyond its always indefinite eastern frontiers. Bearing in mind the slow means of transportation and the hazards and difficulties of travel at that time, we may say that Byzantium was to the Armenians of the Middle Ages what the big towns of the United States were to the persecuted elements of our people at the beginning of this century. Those who had the means would migrate westward toward the fabulous imperial city, in order to find there security, honors and wealth, or just to seek adventure.

Many Armenians in the Byzantine empire rose to prominent positions. To be a successful businessman was not, at the time, a thing of honor and no record is kept of those Armenians who must have bought and sold with characteristic acumen. The only businessman of sorts who has escaped oblivion is one John Ithmeus who sold to the emperor a horse’s bit made of gold and precious stones. The thing was his own handiwork. He passed it off as an antique. He was exiled.

There is one Byzantine emperor, Leo V, who was an Armenian beyond doubt: his Armenianess is acknowledged by the Greeks themselves. He reigned early in the ninth century. Basil, born in Macedonia of Armenian parents, reigned from 867 to 886. There were other Armenian emperors, among them the son of an Armenian empress, Theodora, who surrounded himself with Armenian officials. He was Michael III.

Among the many Armenian military leaders mention should be made of Narses, the famous conqueror of Italy under Justinian (527-565 A.D.). John Curcuas is an even more famous Armenian strategist. His "genius brought in a new dawn in the eastern frontiers" against the Arabs. Another Armenian, Melias (or Mleh), was renowned enough to be treated as the formidable enemy of Digenis, the hero of a Byzantine epic poem.

Several bishops of Armenian parentage occupied important sees of the Byzantine church. Archbishop Theodore, for example, was the patriarch of Antioch.

These names are only a few of those which have come down to us. It is therefore amply evident that the Armenians were a large and important segment of the population of the empire and it is understandable, in view of this fact alone, that the Greeks and the Armenians influenced each other in every area of human endeavor.

Armenian influence on Byzantine art is most noticeable in architecture. The German archaeologist Strzygowski has written the following in his book *Armenian Architecture and Europe* (1918): "Greek genius at St. Sophia and Italian genius at St. Peter only realized more fully what the Armenians had originated." This statement may be an exaggeration, as some specialists contend, but it is certainly not baseless.

On the other hand, Greek influence on Armenian literature is at once visible in our many translations from the Greek, as well as in our original works from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. It must be said, however, that when this influence reached its peak in the seventh century, Armenian *grabar* lost something of its classical purity. In fields other than architecture and literature Armenia was instrumental, on the whole, in the transmission to the West of eastern art forms after endowing these with its peculiar characteristics.

A word ought to be said here about the *khatchkar*, a peculiarly Armenian religio-artistic creation. The origin of the *khatchkar* may

well be pre-historic, while the carvings on the known specimens point to the historical period in which they were executed. It is a slab of stone standing upright on its narrow side. A variety of figures are carved on it. It may be said to symbolize the Armenian destiny inasmuch as (a) it stands somewhere between the western statues in the round and the arabesque; and (b) the figures nearly always leave the impression of being cramped. The shape of the stone, like destiny itself, seems to determine and then limit the figure carved on it. Nor is it accidental that on these slabs the cross occurs most often. Some khatchkars are as eloquent as the prayers of St. Gregory of Narec.

We shall speak of the religious controversies between the Greeks and the Armenians in our introduction to Story XXI. No such controversies existed before the fifth century and John Chrysostom—the hero of our story—who died in 407 is the last Greek patriarch of outstanding fame for whom our fathers had an unadulterated respect. He was a representative of the “Antiochene school of theology”, that is, of a group of Christian thinkers who were not inclined to mysticism and who focussed their attention on Christ as Man rather than as God.

The people of Antioch—where Chrysostom was born—were notorious for their fickleness and insubordination. Daphne, a sacred grove nearby, was endowed with the right of asylum: no one could be arrested within its limits, no matter what the crime. Against such a background, the virtues of Chrysostom and of the hermits of Antioch are all the more outstanding.

We say in our story that not all the bishops and priests were willing to live as Chrysostom ordered. The reference is to the ill-famed patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, and to his equally ill-famed followers and supporters. They held a meeting near Chalcedon at the “Palace of the Oak Tree” and had John Chrysostom deposed by means of a false document. They brought twenty-nine charges against the saint. Twenty-eight of these charges were entirely made up. The remaining one was a distortion of the truth.

We also say in the story that St. John refused to oppose, at the empress' wish, the people whom she detested. Here the reference is to Eutropius, a eunuch. When the latter fell from royal favor, Chrysostom believed this to be sufficient punishment for a power-hungry man. But Empress Eudoxia could not be satisfied with less than Eutropius' execution. She herself died in childbirth.

HE OPPOSED EMPERORS TO SERVE GOD

(THE STORY OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM)

Great preparations were being made in the city of Antioch. People stopped on their way to the shops to watch the workers who were busy putting up decorations or building arches on the great avenue. Others were washing the gold-painted statues along the way. Antioch was one of the greatest, richest and most important cities of the ancient world. Today the town of Antioch is on Turkish territory and it is a small and poor town. But it was so luxurious in the fourth century that people believed it to be the closest thing to Paradise. At one time the emperor himself and his important officials, princes and generals lived there along with a quarter of a million other people. Only a few of those who lived at Antioch at that time are known today, and the best known among these is a father of the church. His name is John. He was fourteen years old when the emperor came to his beloved city.

That was a day John never forgot. Half the people of the town were full of joy. The emperor's coming to their town meant more visitors, more parades, more money, more theatres, and more fun. This half of the population of Antioch were pagans and so was the emperor, Julian. Other emperors before him had been Christians, but Julian thought that Christianity did not have the right answers to some of the questions that people ask themselves about God and about the world. He tried to bring back the worship of many gods. He wanted the people of his empire to practice religions that had already seen their day. For this reason the good Christians of Antioch were not at all happy when His Imperial Majesty moved in with all his court.

There were as many Christians in Antioch as pagans. "Surely

the pagan emperor's moving to our town will bring trouble," they said to themselves. They feared a clash between the Christian and the pagan people of the town. And so it happened.

It was the custom of the emperor to take advice from Apollo whenever he was about to do something important. Apollo was a god and his statue stood near Antioch in a magnificent temple, in a garden known as Daphne. When a question was put to Apollo, *he* could not answer of course. How can a statue talk? Therefore specially chosen people would work themselves up to a sort of frenzy and would do the talking for the god. The things they said were known as Apollo's *oracles*.

One day the emperor went to hear the oracles of Apollo and Apollo refused to say anything.

"I know why the god is silent," said the emperor's minister. The emperor was eager to know the reason.

"There is a dead body here that is an insult to the god," said the minister.

What the minister wanted was the destruction of a small chapel that had been built over the remains of a saint in Daphne. The emperor gave the order and the chapel was immediately destroyed by the pagans. The Christians took the remains of the saint—Babylas was his name—and carried them solemnly to a church in Antioch. John was in the crowd. As soon as they arrived in the church, somebody brought the news that the temple of Apollo was on fire. John ran back to Daphne. He ran a whole hour and when he reached the garden he was breathless. As he stood watching the burning pagan temple, "that," he said to himself, "is the way God punishes the emperor for not letting the Christians have their little chapel in this vast garden."

When he was still a boy John studied with a pagan teacher. His own father was a pagan. But he learned about Jesus from his mother and later came to prefer the teachings of a learned Christian monk whom he visited several times each week. John himself became a monk. He lived in a cave, alone, wore rough clothes, prayed and studied the Bible.

When he came back to town, John was no longer physically very healthy, but his spirit had become very strong. He was ordained a priest by the bishop of Antioch and his small size, bald head, wide, wrinkled forehead, deep-set eyes, hollow cheeks and grey beard soon became a familiar sight in the cathedral of Antioch. He was not an old man, but his beard was grey all the same.

Father John was an extraordinary preacher. People would come from distant places to listen to him. His voice was not very strong but he spoke so well that people did not mind. He himself was a very educated person but did not show off his learning; he spoke in a way as to be understood even by those who did not know how to read and write. He spoke from his heart. He knew how to tell stories and how to make difficult things easy to understand. He spoke mostly about Jesus Christ and people felt calmer inside after hearing him preach. He spoke against those who can, but do not try, to make others happier. He spoke against girls and women who spend hours and hours in front of a looking glass applying cosmetics to their faces and doing their hair. He spoke against all those, whether laymen or clergymen, who wear a false smile on their faces just to please people. He spoke about things that mattered very much, and as he spoke his listeners were fascinated, as they would be if they saw gold pouring out of a spring. For this reason we know him as Saint John *Chrysostom*. He also wrote books that people still read after hundreds of years. He wrote about God: we cannot understand God because He is too great for our minds, but we can certainly do His will, Saint John said. He wrote about priests: the most responsible people in the world are the priests, he said, because other people should learn from *them* how to obey God's law.

Saint John Chrysostom always had the secret desire of returning to a monastery in order to live a monk's life. But there were not, at the time, many people as saintly and as capable as he. They would not let him go back to a monastery. Instead, he was made the patriarch of Constantinople. There was no higher

position in the whole church. The year was 398. He was now fifty-one years old.

Saint John Chrysostom disliked golden objects and all ornate, expensive things. Now that he was patriarch he could afford almost anything he wanted, but he lived simply all the same. He urged others to live simply. One night as he was leading a procession carrying the relics of a saint to a church outside Constantinople, he was glad to see that the emperor's wife was also following the procession, barefoot, dressed simply as a maid of the Lord. The humility of the empress made him exceedingly happy. "What shall I say?" he said in a sermon, "I am bubbling with joy . . . I am drunk with spiritual delights!" He ordered all the bishops and the priests and the deacons of the empire to live lives of virtue and simplicity so that they might be examples to the rest of the people. But not all the bishops and priests and deacons were willing to live as the patriarch ordered. Some were more interested in the things of this world. They resented him. Nor was Eudoxia, the emperor's wife, as humble as Saint John had thought. She was full of vanity. She wanted to be the ruler of the realm. She turned against the patriarch with all her power and fury when she found out that he was not going to be silent about her sinful ways. With her help the enemies of the patriarch began to plot against him. They spread false rumors. "You know," they would whisper whenever they had a chance, "the patriarch *looks* like a saint, but he *really* isn't. He calls the empress bad names; every night, when no one sees him, he has a table set for himself and eats the finest foods and drinks the most expensive wines . . ."

One day the patriarch shocked his guests by receiving them without a shirt. He was pale and so thin that the ribs of his chest could almost be seen and counted. He was surely not a gluttonous eater. Yet his enemies were not interested in the truth. They kept whispering their lies about him. Finally they held an open meeting, and with the help of Eudoxia they had him driven out of Constantinople.

No sooner was the patriarch exiled than an earthquake shook

the palace and the empress was frightened in her sleep. She begged the patriarch to return, but the reconciliation did not last. This time she had a silver statue of herself placed in front of the main door of the cathedral. The patriarch, as determined and as courageous as ever, could not put up with the vanity of this woman, even if she *was* the empress. The court of the cathedral was no place for such statues. He would rather see it melted and the silver distributed to the poor. "Again Herodias dances, again she rages, again she demands the head of John," he said. When Eudoxia's weak husband, the emperor, asked the patriarch to resign, he refused. He would obey God rather than the emperor. But in the meantime violence increased in the streets of Constantinople. As Saint John refused to side with the empress against the people she detested, she became more and more furious and hired villains to disturb the peace of the city and to force the patriarch out. In order to stop all the bloodshed, the saintly head of the church took once more the uncertain road of exile. He was not yet out of Constantinople when the cathedral began to burn; it and part of the palace were destroyed.

The exiled patriarch travelled far and wide. Eudoxia's hatred of him never ceased. At last, weary and sick, he reached Armenian territory. He was still writing letters, asking for a fair hearing, fighting against sin, vanity and pride.

One night the saint had a vision. A martyr from the place of his exile said to him: "Tomorrow we shall be together." He died peacefully the next day, that is on the 14th of September, 407. "Glory be to God for all things" were his last words.

Saint John Chrysostom is one of the most-honored saints of the Armenian church.

Introduction to Story XI

These two stories (XI and XII) will cover what may be considered the most important period of our history, for it is at this time that the Armenian alphabet was invented. This achievement required the harmonious efforts of three men, each of whom was equally animated by an unselfish devotion to Christ and to the Armenian people: Saint Sahac, Saint Mesrop and King Vramshapouh. The former two have been designated as the “peerless pair”. As to King Vramshapouh, he too combined in his person qualities that are rarely observed together in a ruler. That these men are the principal architects of the Golden Age of Armenia is an everlasting and glorious witness to their profound piety and genuine patriotism.

When Saint Nersess the Great died in 373, Sahac, his son, was a young man of twenty-five. He would have been promptly elected to occupy the see of catholicos, but he was then in Byzantium, pursuing his studies and was not therefore immediately available. Yet the see could not be left vacant in the trying circumstances that affected the country.

Armenians always preferred for the see of catholicos men of the house of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. When a descendant of Saint Gregory was not available, they would have recourse to the family of Albianus, a former mobed (i.e. a Zoroastrian “high priest”) who had been consecrated a bishop by Saint Gregory himself. Following the death of Saint Nersess one of the descendants of Albianus, Shahac of Manazcairt, became the catholicos. The year is given as 373, at which time Shahac was over seventy years of age.

In the first year of Shahac’s reign as catholicos, King Pap was murdered in a plot by order of the Greek emperor (see Introduction to Story IX). Pap had been invited to the residence of Trajan, a Graeco-Roman commander and attacked there by a vandal during the banquet given “in his honor”. The Armenian king rose to his own

defense but was over-powered by Trajan's captains. His son, Varazdat, a man of proverbial physical strength but of little wisdom, was made King of Armenia through the support of the same Greek emperor (Valens) who had maneuvered Pap's assassination.

Shahac died in 377 and was succeeded by Zavenn I of Manazcairt of the house of the above-mentioned Albianus. It was at this time that the Byzantine empire was exposed to the invasions of the Goths. Consequently interest in its eastern frontiers waned and political preference in Armenia shifted to the Persian side. Of major importance is the fact that the *Mamiconians* saw the salvation of Armenia in its alliance with the Persian empire. This was at the time a healthy political attitude encouraged, moreover, by the assassination of the valiant Moushel' Mamiconian by King Varazdat, the puppet of the Greek emperor. Moushel' was avenged by Manuel Mamiconian in a battle near the city of Carinn. He could have had King Varazdat killed, but he did not wish the Mamiconians to be guilty of regicide. A famous historical novel, *Samuel*, deals with this eventful period. It is by Raffi (1835-1888), and has been translated into French.

Manuel Mamiconian can be included among the great leaders of Armenia. He proved to be a benevolent dictator, that is just the man the country needed at the time. A work of reconstruction began in the devastated land and peace reigned during his regency. He reconciled the many warring nakharars, proceeded to repair the damages caused by the anti-ecclesiastical policies of the late King Pap, declared the latter's wife Queen of Armenia, and her two boys co-kings of the country. Of these boys the younger, Val'arshac, died in his youth. The older, Arshac III, eventually became the sole ruler of Armenia.

After a rule of seven short years Manuel Mamiconian died of a natural death — a rare thing in those days for a man of his position. Manuel regretted the manner of his passing. "Rather than croak like an animal" lying down comfortably, he would have preferred to die, weapons in hand, "for our Armenian land, for the Armenian people, for the Arsacid lords of the country, for the churches . . ." In vain, he said, "have I daringly thrown myself into battles and yet my lot was to die dismally in bed."

Arshac III was the protege of the *Byzantine* emperor who was now Theodosius I (mentioned in our Divine Liturgy). In order to counter-balance Arshac's power, the *Persian* emperor, Shapur III, appointed Khosrov (Chosroes) III as king over the eastern provinces of Arme-

nia. It is under this Khosrov that Saint Sahac became catholicos in 387, following the death of Aspourakess of Manazcairt who had followed Catholicos Zavenn I. Khosrov's approval of Sahac had displeased the Persian king of kings. Shapur called Khosrov to his capital, Ctesiphon, and had him thrown into the Dungeon of Oblivion. Khosrov's brother Vramshapouh, mentioned in the first paragraph above, was made king in his stead. This arrangement proved to be a blessing for Armenia. We might point out here that with Saint Sahac the catholicate had passed from the house of Albianus back to the house of Saint Gregory the Enlightener.

In the eighties of the fourth century (possibly in 387) Theodosius I and Shapur III sealed a treaty by which Armenia was parcelled out between them. The western provinces of Armenia were, for all intents and purposes, annexed to the Byzantine empire. Arshac, who died childless, was the last king of Western Armenia, and after him this part of the land was governed by a Greek consul. We shall learn of the destiny of Eastern or Persian Armenia in the introduction to Story XIV. Let it suffice here to say that this compromise, whereby Armenia lost her independence for several centuries, was a major political blunder of the Byzantine emperor Theodosius. By eliminating a buffer state he left the eastern flank of the empire open to Persian attacks. This was a sottish deviation from the traditional policy of Rome.

Saint Sahac ascended the throne of catholicos shortly after the signing of that fateful treaty. His first move was to obtain personally from the Persian "king of kings", Bahram-Gor, approval for his own pontificate. His capacity as a negotiator made him obtain several other favours from the Persian ruler who was greatly impressed by Sahac's wisdom and comportment. The crowning work of Saint Sahac's life is of course his authoritative translation of the Bible and generally his encouragement of that project. In a second important enterprise, after the creation of the alphabet, St. Sahac obtained from the Byzantine emperor the right to teach written Armenian to the people of Western Armenia. For this purpose he sent a delegation headed by St. Mesrop to Byzantium, while he himself gained the good graces of Anatolius, the emperor's representative in the Pontus and Western Armenia. Nonetheless, Armenian nakharars made false charges against him and had him sent into exile in his old age. Freed at 84, his last six years were devoted to matters of Christian faith. He died while in flight from Persian hordes in 436.

THE BIBLE IS TRANSLATED
INTO ARMENIAN
(THE STORY OF SAINT SAHAC)

On the Holy Friday of the year 378 the people of the city of Val'arshapat had gone to church for that day's evening service. Following the service they sat assembled in the church, praying, and thinking about the death of Jesus. Only whispers would break the general silence, occasionally.

"Who is that man sitting near the altar with his head in his hands, mother?" asked a little boy in as low a voice as he could. The mother, too, had noticed the man.

"He is Deacon Sahac", she said softly, leaning over. "He is a very learned man. His father's great great grandfather was Saint Gregory the Enlightener."

The boy looked at him once more with sparkles in his eyes.

Deacon Sahac was in deep thought, but suddenly he looked up. Some people who saw him move nudged each other. The famous deacon was looking at something that *they* could not see. In fact, he was having a vision. It was like a dream, only more real:

The altar was suddenly covered with a white linen and a flashing cross appeared on top of it. The altar opened up and the deacon saw a table on which there were loaves of bread and bunches of grapes. There was also a tray and on the tray a golden globe and a dried skin. On the skin were lines of golden letters. Some of the golden lines were rubbed out and the last lines were red instead of gold. Then he saw many children, more boys than girls. They grew up instantly. There was something like an earthquake. The boys stood up on the table and from there they went up to heaven.

"I wonder what all this means," Saint Sahac was asking himself in a daze. The vision continued. *A figure appeared and ex-*

plained to the saint its meaning: "Armenia," he said, "is going to lose its independence. It is going to be divided between the Persians and the Romans. It is going to split in two halves as an earthquake splits open the earth. You yourself shall become a priest and then a catholicos and shall serve the world. You shall be the last descendant of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. With you the family of Saint Gregory which came down from son to son shall come to an end as the golden lines on the dried skin. You must have noticed," the figure went on explaining, "that some lines were rubbed out on the dried skin. That is because between Saint Nersess and you three bishops occupied the see of catholicos who were not of the house of Saint Gregory. Many people, more men than women, will be martyred, after you. They will die for the sake of Jesus Christ and will go to heaven."

The mysterious figure disappeared. The vision had come to an end. Saint Sahac now knew that he had a great work to do for the Armenian people, and for the whole Christian church.

Following the vision Saint Sahac lived as a monk for nine years. He wanted to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ. He decided to wear clothes made of coarse material; he carried an iron weight around his waist, and did not wear shoes. Soon he had some sixty followers and became the head of a community of monks who went about educating the people and helping the poor and the sick. His wife was now dead. He had only a daughter who was married to the chief military official of the Armenian court. His name was Hamazasp Mamiconian. Hamazasp had a son whose name was Vardan.

When Saint Sahac became the catholicos of the Armenian church he was nearly forty years of age. It was at that time that the rulers at Ctesiphon and at Byzantium (or Constantinople) divided our land between themselves. As a result there was a Persian Armenia and a Byzantine or Roman Armenia. Saint Sahac had gone to school in Byzantium and was one of the world's best educated men. But he now lived in Persian Armenia, in the province of Ayrarat, where the official residence of the catholicos was located.

The princes of Persian Armenia paid taxes, at the time, to the Persian king. The king had a great army and the lords of Armenia could not oppose him.

When the king of Persia heard at Ctesiphon, his capital, that Sahac had become catholicos, he was very much displeased. He called in his advisers and said:

“Sahac’s becoming the catholicos of the Armenians is against our pleasure. We know that he has received his education in Byzantium. Perhaps he likes the Romans more than he likes us. Perhaps he will turn against us. The catholicos has great power. Therefore Sahac must not be the catholicos. It is our wish that he come here to Ctesiphon for a conference with us.” The great king leaned back on his splendid throne, lowered his eyelids like a cat and, “perhaps we shall *keep* him here”, he murmured to himself.

The king’s orders were communicated to Saint Sahac at once, and before long he was in Ctesiphon. The interview with the Persian king was tense for a while, but then everyone relaxed. Saint Sahac had great confidence in his own intelligence. He knew that he would eventually cause the king to see the truth. He convinced him that it was good *for the Persians* to keep in touch with the Greeks. “Therefore,” he said to the king, “my having a Greek education is to your advantage. Through the Armenians you will know the good things that the Greeks have, and they will know the good things that you have. It is good for the peoples of the world to keep in touch with each other, to exchange ideas and ways of doing things, rather than fight.”

Saint Sahac spoke so well that the king admired his wisdom. He knew, now, that the catholicos would not try to do harm to the non-Christian Persian empire. He then recognized Sahac officially, gave him many gifts, granted every favour that the catholicos asked for, and sent him back to Armenia.

The king of Armenia was then a good and great king. His name was Vramshapouh. He too wanted peace. There were no wars for several years, and during this period something hap-

pened that the Armenians will remember forever with gratitude. Next to their becoming Christians, this was their greatest blessing.

A very learned Armenian monk and a life-long companion of Saint Sahac had invented the Armenian letters. We shall see how this invention was made in our next story. The important thing is that for the first time in their entire history the Armenians could WRITE in their own language. And the first book that they wanted to see translated into their own language was the Bible. Saint Sahac rendered this unforgettable service to his people. With some help from other learned monks, he translated the Bible into Armenian. Many other books were also translated from the Greek and other languages. Some authors wrote books in Armenian. There was a great animation all over the country. Thousands of people flocked to schools to learn how to write and read in their own language. Though there was a shortage of schools and teachers, many books were written and many people were educated in an astonishingly short time. Saint Sahac was entirely occupied with this work. Now that the Armenian people *had* the Bible in their own language, he wanted them to *read* and *hear* it. He wanted the bishops and priests in particular to read, also, the other books that were written in Armenian. He himself began to teach. He went about the country to supervise the work of education. His own efforts and those of his learned companions were so successful that we now call the period in which they lived THE GOLDEN AGE of Armenia. Historians tell us that the spirit of Saint Sahac was like a source from which living waters ran and made Armenia more beautiful than ever.

In the year 417 Saint Sahac went to Western Armenia to establish schools and to teach the language there. But the Greek consul of that part of Armenia would not allow him.

“The only language we want taught here is Greek,” he said.

Saint Sahac seldom took a “no” for an answer. He sent a delegation to the emperor himself. This delegation returned after having obtained the emperor’s permission. In a few years the Armenians of Persian Armenia and those of Byzantine Armenia

could write their own language in the same way. They all felt more than ever that they belonged to the same family, even though they were politically divided.

In the meantime Vramshapouh had died and the king of Armenia was now Artashir. Quarrels had developed among the Armenian lords. When the catholicos came back to Val'arshapat they came to him with a terrible project that made him very sad.

"We do not want this king any more," they said, "and we are going to ask the king of Persia to depose him."

Saint Sahac was horrified.

"How can you be traitors to your own country?" he said.

"He is a bad king," the lords answered.

"I know, but a sick lamb is better than a healthy beast," the catholicos pleaded with them, but the lords would not listen. A Persian ruler did displace the Armenian king in the end, and Saint Sahac was exiled.

Later, at the age of eighty-four, the saint was allowed by the Persian king to return to Armenia, but not to Val'arshapat. The Persians were oppressing the Armenians and the lords of the land were sorry they had exchanged their own king for a Persian governor. "We should have listened to the catholicos," they said.

Saint Sahac himself lived and worked six more years to keep his people in the true faith. These were trying years but the catholicos was at peace. He knew that he would live and grow in stature in the hearts and minds of his people, and that time could not work against him.

Introduction to Story XII

Mesrop Mashthotz, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, was born at the village of Hatzic in the Armenian province of Taron in the early fifties of the fourth century. His father's name was Vardan and the place of his birth leads some historians to believe that he belonged to the Mamiconian house. Mashthotz showed scholarly tendencies in his youth. As a nobleman he followed a military career, and eventually was put in charge of the royal archives. When he resigned from this post in 394 to become a monk, the king, Vramshapouh, could not replace him easily.

At that time Saint Mesrop was about forty years old. He assumed the name Mesrop (derived from the Hebrew word "Seraph" meaning "an angel of the highest order") at his ordination to the priesthood, and he devoted the remaining forty-five years of his life to: *a*) the discovery of the Armenian alphabet; *b*) the translation of the Bible—a work in which he assisted Saint Sahac; *c*) the teaching of Armenian literature and of the Christian faith; *d*) the working out of plans and negotiations for the spread of Armenian culture to all parts of the land, whether Byzantine or Persian; *e*) the elimination of a heresy that threatened to undermine belief in the reality and divinity of Christ; *f*) missionary work in Georgia and ancient Albania (a district of Eastern Caucasus); *g*) the administration of the catholicos' office with, but mostly in the absence of, Saint Sahac; *h*) supervision of scores of translators who made available to Armenians the prominent works of Western culture; and *i*) the stabilization of the rites of the sacraments and other services of the Armenian church.

Such difficult tasks could not, as one can readily see, allow Saint Mesrop a moment's idleness. He managed to perform them all with astonishing success because he led the life of a dedicated monk. At the very heart of this life was the love of Christ and all else was subordinated to it. His burning desire to help his people along the paths of the true religion kept him in a permanent state of healthy restlessness and

enabled him to disregard any time-and-energy-consuming concern for his own self. We know that up to the time of Saint Mesrop the Armenian language, although spoken, could not be written. And we must bear in mind that even if there had been a written language, most people would not have been able to use it, for illiteracy was the rule and not the exception. As for the court and the nobility, they used either Greek or Persian for their official correspondence and other needs of written communication. It must be noted, in this connection, that before Christianity took sizable roots in Armenia, the illiteracy of the people was not a *problem* to the king and other noblemen, because in the feudal social structure society was stable, the social boundaries between one class and another were well-defined and it never occurred to a man of the nobility that a plebeian had either the need of reading and writing or the right thereto. The political rights and duties of a person were determined almost entirely in terms of the social level to which he belonged and cultural advancement was conditioned largely by the current political concepts.

For the first time in the history of the land an eminently *popular* concern arose in connection with the rise and spread of Christianity. As far as the leaders of the church were concerned, every Armenian, regardless of his social position, was a child of God. An ordinary peasant no less and no more than the king himself stood in need of salvation. One instrument of salvation was of course the Bible. The Bible had therefore to be translated into the language of the people. Thus, for religious reasons and on the basis of the equality of all men in the sight of God, an unprecedented popular service was rendered. The goal of the movement initiated by Saint Sahac and Saint Mesrop was the translation of the Scriptures; the invention of the Armenian alphabet was a necessary means to that end.

The Syriac and Greek alphabets helped Saint Mesrop in his task, but they were not enough. "Syriac" means "Syrian language". It does not have vowels and it is written from right to left. Saint Mesrop adopted the more advanced and flexible Greek principles and order of writing. He then supplemented the combined Syriac and Greek alphabets with such signs as were necessary to render graphically the spoken Armenian language. The grammatical construction of sentences that he and his assistants devised followed the Western pattern. All the above was mostly Saint Mesrop's own, inspired, original work. We owe it to his scholarship, artistry and intelligence.

From the beginning of Christianity in Armenia the Bible was read to the people in translation. During the various services one person, the *verdzanol'* would read the scriptural lesson and another, the *thargamanich* would stand by his side and translate the passage to the congregation. This procedure involved several drawbacks of which one of the more serious was the tendency of the interpreter to paraphrase or explain a given passage, rather than to give an exact translation. He would do this not because he *could* not translate with a measure of exactitude, but because he aimed at the edification of the people. But even if, in his own mind, he did achieve exactitude, a translation done by an ordinary interpreter was never "authoritative" and thus the faithful were for ever deprived of hearing "authoritative" scriptures, namely the sacred text as examined and duly approved by the lawful authorities of the church. The translation effected by Saint Sahac, the scholarly catholicos of the Armenian church, removed this major inconvenience. The personal idiosyncrasies of the different interpreters no longer interfered with the sacred text. In order to appreciate the importance of this matter we merely have to remember that the Armenian word for Bible ("book") is *Astwadzashounch*. This word means literally "God-inspired", and it expresses a fundamental belief of the Armenian church, to the effect that the contents of *the* Book are inspired by God the Holy Spirit. It should therefore be translated with authoritative exactitude. The Greeks thought, then, that the only valid text of the Bible, mainly of the New Testament, was the Greek. The Hebrews had held similar convictions regarding the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The question arises: from which text did our translators do their translation?

There are two major ancient texts of the Old Testament: the *Massoretic* ("traditional") text, which is a Hebrew text going back to the second century A.D., and the *Septuagint*. The latter is a Greek version of the Old Testament, parts of which were done in the third century B.C. It is said to have been completed by 130 B.C. This is the text that Saint Sahac used, parts of which are better preserved than the Massoretic. As for the New Testament, there are good reasons to believe that the Armenian translation was done from a manuscript discovered during the early years of this century. It is sometimes referred to as *Codex Syro-Sinaiticus*.

THE INVENTION
OF THE ARMENIAN LETTERS
(THE STORY OF SAINT MESROP)

There was a time in Armenia when even grown-up and educated people could not write their names in their own language. Nowhere was there anything written in Armenian, because there were no Armenian letters. There were no books in Armenian. People were not particularly unhappy about the lack of books in general. But there was one book they would have liked very much to have: *the Bible*. They knew *about* the Bible. They knew every story in it. Many learned Armenians knew everything that was in the Bible and they knew how to explain it. But those who knew how to read and write would have to read it in Greek or in Syrian. Even in the churches the Bible was read in one of these languages and someone had to translate it into Armenian for the congregation. People did not mind the time that this system took, but good interpreters were hard to find. Besides, everyone wanted to hear the Bible exactly as it was written. "O Lord," they would say, "make Your word heard by us not in a language that is foreign to us, but in our own language."

This was the desire of many people, particularly of the good clergymen. Then one priest decided to do something about it. He was formerly the keeper of the official documents of the royal court. He left that position of worldly importance and became a monk. He was ordained a priest at the age of forty.

People had known him for forty years by the name of Mashthotz. At his ordination his name changed to Mesrop, but everyone still remembered his older name. He came to be known as Mesrop Mashthotz. He is one of our most important saints. When Saint Mesrop became a priest, the catholicos of the Ar-

menian church was Saint Sahac. They had known each other for a long time. They were close friends because they had the same convictions and shared the same interests.

One day Saint Sahac was working on a new copy of the Bible. He was wearing a black robe and his long beard was spread over his chest. His broad forehead was resting on his left hand and with a feather in his right hand he was making corrections. His secretary came in with a message, but did not dare interrupt him at once. Saint Sahac was working with great concentration and would not look up.

“Excuse me, Your Holiness,” the secretary finally said in a muted voice, “Father Mesrop is here; he would like to see Your Holiness about an important matter.”

No sooner had Saint Sahac and Saint Mesrop greeted each other than the latter began to talk with great excitement. “I have heard the most wonderful news ever!” he said. “I must go, I must go at once!” he went on almost out of breath. “You know Daniel the Syrian? Do you remember? Well, he *has* them. He has . . .”

“The Armenian letters,” Saint Sahac completed the sentence.

“How did *you* know?” wondered Saint Mesrop.

“I know that nothing else would fill you so with joy,” said Saint Sahac. “In fact, I was about to send the messenger to you to arrange a conference with the king. You know that His Majesty is also very much interested in this matter. He may know more about it than we think.”

“Can’t we go and see His Majesty without further delay?” asked Saint Mesrop.

“I suppose we can,” said the catholicos and within less than an hour they were at the palace of King Vramshapouh.

They had no time to waste. After a short meeting they came to the conclusion that the letters that Daniel the Syrian had were not, perhaps, exactly what they wanted. But still, they should investigate and find out. It was decided to send the court minister, Vahrij, to Daniel the Syrian immediately. The king would pay all the expenses. He would also pay the ex-

penses for the opening of new schools as well as the salaries of the teachers who would teach the reading and writing of Armenian.

Vahrij went to Mesopotamia. His instructions were to find Daniel the Syrian, learn all about the Armenian letters that that scholar might have, and return home as soon as possible. In the meantime Saint Sahac and Saint Mesrop organized schools in Armenia. The news about the Armenian letters had spread throughout the land. Many students came to Val'arshapat, the capital, from all parts of the country. Saint Sahac and Saint Mesrop chose the most learned men available. "As soon as the letters come," they said, "we shall learn how to use them, then we shall teach others."

When Vahrij returned he was received with shouts of joy. A priest had come with him from Mesopotamia. His name was Habel. They presented the letters to the king, who in turn gave them to the catholicos and his learned friend. After a few weeks many of the educated men of Armenia were working with those letters. They were trying to write words and sentences. Whenever they had any difficulty they would come to Saint Mesrop and he would, in turn, consult with Saint Sahac. There were ever new difficulties. No matter how hard they tried, the letters would not meet their needs.

"I think," Saint Sahac said to Saint Mesrop, "you must go yourself to Mesopotamia. You know all the difficulties we are having with these letters. Go to Antioch, to Edessa, to Samosata. There are some learned men in those towns. Talk with them. See what you can do."

Saint Mesrop took with him some of his students and left the country. He was determined to come back with a working alphabet. Some of the people Saint Sahac had told him about could not be found. Others knew no better than he. He was working on his task day and night. He tried the Greek letters. He put together the Greek and Syriac letters and tried again. But *some* letters were missing. As he rode in a carriage or walked down the street, suddenly a new Armenian word would come to his

mind; he would try to write it in imagination but the letters that he had would not be enough. Every night he would kneel down and pray: "O Lord, give light to my mind, so that I may find the missing letters. Give us a written language, so that we may translate your Holy Book, so that we may read Your words and the words of Your saints in a language of our own!"

One day Saint Mesrop was half asleep and half awake. He was dreaming of all the books of the Bible, written in his beloved Armenian language from one end to the other. "If only my dream would come true!" he said to himself in a daze. Suddenly a smooth rock appeared in front of him. And a divine hand. The hand was writing. . . writing the missing letters. Yes! There they were! The missing letters! Saint Mesrop woke up with a feeling of thanks. He had never been so thankful in his life before. Now he knew all the thirty-six letters of the Armenian alphabet. Now he could write any Armenian word he wished. Any word at all. The Armenian people had their own alphabet at last! The problem was solved. That was one of the greatest days in the history of Armenia. The year was 406.

Saint Mesrop could not wait to try his new discovery by writing a sentence. He took out a piece of parchment and translated from a Syriac Bible the first words of the Book of the Proverbs of Solomon: "To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding." That was the very first sentence ever written down in Armenian.

Saint Sahac and Saint Mesrop realized in Val'arshapat that the invention of the alphabet was only a first step. The next great work was the translation of the Bible into Armenian. Saint Sahac began that work immediately. But people should be able to read *first*, before they could read the Bible. About a hundred teachers began to teach the Armenian language to hundreds of students. The catholicos himself loved to teach the new language; and there was a brave boy to whom he, in person, taught the Armenian letters at a time when very few knew them: his name was Vardan Mamiconian.

Our holy translators worked without rest. In a very short

time the most important books of the period could be found in Armenia, translated into the language of the country.

But now there was a new obstacle in the way. The Greeks would not let the Armenians teach their own language to their own people in the western part of Armenia. Saint Sahac sent Saint Mesrop to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. The emperor was then Theodosius II, a young man of sixteen. The patriarch of Constantinople was Atticus. They listened to Saint Mesrop and granted his wish. His knowledge and wisdom impressed them so much that they recognized him as a teacher who could teach anywhere in the Christian world.

When Saint Mesrop came back to Armenia, he made a tour of the country to teach the Christian faith and to correct errors. He was invited by the kings both of Georgia and of ancient Albania to their countries, so that their peoples too might have written languages. The inventor of our alphabet accepted the invitation and helped them.

Saint Mesrop spent the later years of his life at Val'arshapat. He became an assistant to the catholicos and in the absence of Saint Sahac he would guide and govern the Armenian church.

He died in 437, and was buried at the village of Oshacann. His spirit lives on. Whenever we write a word in Armenian, it is as if Saint Mesrop were there, holding our hand.

Introduction to Story XIII

We said a word in our introduction to Story X about the Antiochene school of theology. A famous representative of this school is Theodore of Mopsuestia. His writings were condemned because he had failed to think of Christ as the Redeemer. The preposterous conclusion of his teachings was that there were two persons in Jesus Christ, even if Theodore himself would not say so in so many words, and several religious thinkers of Antioch tended to be in fundamental agreement with Theodore. The people of Antioch were not, as a rule, of a mystical temperament. They could not see that some religious truths could be beyond the ken of logic. This does not mean, however, that all the teachers of Antioch were given to heresy. One could have an Antiochene mentality and be a father of the church, like Saint John Chrysostom, as long as one did not wander from the Bible and the tradition of the church.

Different from, and, in many ways, opposed to the Antiochene mentality, was the Alexandrian school of theology. The great Athanasius, “the Doctor of the Holy Trinity”, belonged to this school and so did Cyril of Alexandria. The writings that were translated into Armenian during our Golden Age reflected the Alexandrian way of looking at the person and nature of Christ, that is to say, they focused attention on Christ as the Incarnate Lord and the Redeemer. Yet the preference of Armenian theologians for the Alexandrian ways of thinking was not a historical accident. The Armenians had had ample contact with Antioch too, but their intellectual keenness and religious sensitivity led them to see the truth in the positions maintained in Alexandria, the Egyptian (or Coptic) metropolis.

Cyril of Alexandria is sometimes referred to as the Doctor of the Incarnation. In the Syrian liturgy he is referred to as “a tower of truth and interpreter of the Word of God made flesh.” The Roman Catholic church declared him a Doctor of the Universal Church in 1882. Pope Pius XII speaks of him in an encyclical letter as “this light of Christian

wisdom and valiant hero of the apostolate." He is also known as "the Seal of the Fathers" and "Great Cyril". The Greek church has a profound veneration for his teachings, and the Armenians find in him the great champion of their position with regard to the person and nature of Christ.

Of the early life of Cyril little is known. He was a monk in the Egyptian desert and that is where he acquired his knowledge of the ancient thinkers, both pagan and Christian. A superior at his monastery once rebuked him for having worldly thoughts and interests, and this remark shows a trait of his character that he could not overcome easily. His activities even as a bishop of Alexandria are marked by impatience, to say the least. He was a nephew of Theophilus, the very one who held a "trumped-up" synod near Constantinople to have Saint John Chrysostom deposed. Cyril was himself present at that synod. Apparently he was sincere in his mistaken belief that Saint John ought to be deposed and he never felt warmly towards him thereafter. And there are other incidents that are indicative of his violent temper.

When Cyril became the bishop of Alexandria in 412, the non-Christian elements of the town were somewhat dismayed. The new patriarch was a powerful preacher, commanded the loyalty of uncompromising Egyptian monks and had considerable wealth, all of which made him a formidable opponent. In order to show their discontent with him the Jews of the town committed a ghastly mistake. They organized little bands which one night went about in the streets shouting: "the church of Alexandria is on fire!" As expected, the Christians rushed out of their houses to put the fire out. There was no fire. The Jews caught them unawares and slew as many of them as they could. Upon receiving the tragic news, Christian charity fled from Cyril's heart and his fury knew no bounds. He ordered other infuriated Christians to descend upon the synagogues, and the retaliation was more bloody than the original offense. Jewish properties were confiscated and the Christians did not rest until the last Jew was driven out of the metropolis.

Men are not born perfect, but they can choose to strive toward perfection. The saints are those who achieve it to an eminent degree. Age mellowed Saint Cyril, yet he had lost none of his energy when the situation required that he come to the fore as a bulwark against forces that threatened belief in the divinity of Christ.

That situation obtained from the year 428 to 451. These are the years of the “christological controversies”, that is, of disputations concerning the person and nature of Christ. All of Christianity being centered upon the person of Christ, these disputations were, of course, of unique importance. The central question to be answered was this: How can the same Person, Jesus Christ, be *infinite* God and *finite* Man at the same time? One answer (the one that was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431) was given to this question by Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople. He was from Antioch and his answer was typically Antiochene. This is roughly what he said: The Word (or the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) and the man Jesus are different as one person is different from another, but, as it were, they work together. Therefore, Nestorius argued, we cannot say of Mary that she was the Mother of God (*Theotokos, Asdwadzazin*); we can at best say that she was the Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*). This answer was entirely unacceptable to Cyril. If we accept Nestorius’ answer, he said, we are forced to say that Christ was “bi-personal” or two persons. On the contrary, Christ is one person, as the soul and the body constitute one human individual; as charcoal and fire constitute the same live coal. God is not part of Christ. Christ is God, and Mary, the Mother of Christ, is, therefore, the Mother of God. If we separate the Word from the Man Jesus Christ, then Jesus will have died on the cross as an ordinary man and we will not be saved, Cyril argued, because one man cannot redeem, cannot save, another man.

The bishop of Rome, Celestine, gave support to the teachings of Cyril. Nestorius was excommunicated. He died in exile in 451, the year of the Council of Chalcedon. We know that it is the formulation of this council regarding the person and nature of Christ that prevents the Armenian church, along with the Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian or Assyrian churches, from being in communion with the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholics.

The symbol, as it were, of the separation is our formulation of our christological attitude which is, following Cyril, “One Nature of the Word (of God) Incarnate.”

Cyril of Alexandria is the last solid rock that stands at the parting of the ways, and it is at least debatable whether he, had he been alive in 451, would have accepted the decisions of Chalcedon. This shows his particular importance to Armenian theology.

A FIGHTER FOR THE TRUTH

(THE STORY OF SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA)

Over a hundred years had passed since the days of the first Christian emperor of the great Byzantine empire. The capital of the empire was Constantinople and it had become one of the most important towns of the world. The two most important people living in Constantinople were the emperor himself and the patriarch. The throne of the emperor was in the palace. The throne of the patriarch was in the great cathedral of Constantinople. When a bishop was made a patriarch, he would sit on his throne in the cathedral during a special ceremony that people loved to watch. They were also eager to be there, in the cathedral, to receive the first blessing of the new patriarch who would be wearing magnificent vestments, heavy with golden threads and precious stones that would shine and twinkle in the light of hundreds of candles.

On April 10, 428, a new patriarch sat on the throne of the cathedral. People pushed each other to catch sight of the new patriarch. They also wanted to see the emperor who was there in his official imperial clothes. Horses were milling about in front of the cathedral, and those near the door could hear their hoofs clattering against the stone pavement. It was usual in Constantinople to have fights on such occasions and the horsemen were there to keep order.

A hush fell over the congregation. The new patriarch was about to preach his first sermon. Patriarch Nestorius was a famous preacher. Few people were, at the time, as learned as he, and he had spent most of his time fighting the heretics, that is those who, in the opinion of the church, had taught wrong things about God and Jesus. At one point during the sermon the patriarch looked at the emperor, raised his right hand and

shouted: "Give me, O prince, the earth clear of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a reward. Help me destroy the heretics and I will help you destroy the Persians!"

The patriarch had great power because the emperor was his friend. Some men in the church, those who were not willing to give up their freedom of thought, shuddered when they heard his words. They knew what was going to happen. To escape punishment, or perhaps to frustrate the patriarch, many people burned their own houses of meeting. Other fires were seen here and there in the first months of the reign of Nestorius, and people began to call the new patriarch, "the Incendiary".

Nestorius was a proud man. He thought God liked him. He thought only *he* knew the truth and must force it on others. He kept persecuting the heretics, but it turned out that he was a heretic himself.

There was a priest in Constantinople who had come from Antioch. One day the patriarch called him into his office and handed him a sermon: "learn this and preach it next Sunday," he said. He and this priest were like-minded. It was shortly before Christmas, and as the day came the cathedral was filled to capacity. No one expected to hear on that day anything unusual. But in the middle of the sermon the priest all of a sudden raised his voice and said:

"Let no one call Mary *the Mother of God!*"

There was a stir. For two hundred years people had been calling the mother of Jesus Christ "Mother of God". Everybody knew that Jesus Christ is God and His mother, Mother of God. They expected the patriarch to correct the priest. But he appeared to have no objections. There was an important writer among the congregation. *He* raised his voice and protested, for it was not uncommon in those days to shout disapprovingly in the middle of a sermon or to applaud at the end. The writer did not know that the patriarch himself had composed the sermon. It was generally believed that the priest had made a mistake, and the incident was about to be forgotten. But then it was a bishop's turn to preach. This bishop had not forgotten

about the mistake of the priest. He spoke about Jesus Christ for a long time and then, "God," he said, "God, out of love for mankind, became Man." This, as everyone knew, was the accepted truth. Yet the patriarch suddenly rose from his throne tense with anger, and ordered the bishop to stop.

There was no longer any doubt in people's minds that Patriarch Nestorius did not agree with the teachings of the church. Soon they stopped receiving communion from him. Many priests would preach sermons against him in their own churches. The patriarch called them "croaking frogs" and forbade them to speak in public. Many were not intimidated. The head of a monastery told him to his face that he was in error. The patriarch had him, and many others with him, imprisoned or exiled. Once Nestorius himself was celebrating the Divine Liturgy. A like-minded bishop was preaching the sermon. When he said that the Virgin Mary should not be called Mother of God, the faithful rose and left the church amid shouts of protest.

By this time the news had spread to all the large towns of the empire. Everyone knew about the false teachings of Nestorius. They also knew that many of his friends and thousands of his followers had formed a party. They were known as the Nestorians. Many bishops of the empire were disturbed. Most disturbed of all was the bishop of Alexandria.

His name was Cyril.

Cyril was a learned man and as great a preacher as Nestorius. He wrote a letter to him and pointed out his mistake. He wrote long letters to the other bishops of the church, to all the monasteries and to all the faithful. He explained at length the errors of Nestorius and then he showed from the Bible and from the writings of the fathers what the truth was which the church taught. The bishop of Rome, Celestine, held a meeting with other bishops of his town and declared Nestorius a heretic. He wrote to Cyril. Let them give Nestorius ten days, he said in his letter, and if in ten days he does not take back all the wrong things he has been saying, the whole church must condemn him. When Nestorius received this news he was not dis-

turbed. As long as the emperor is on his side, he thought, nobody can depose him. But he did not know what a formidable man Cyril was. "I do not care if I suffer and if people insult me," Cyril said, "but the faith must be kept safe." He knew that if Nestorius had his way, if people did not know that Jesus Christ is himself God, the church would soon come to an end.

Nestorius was working feverishly to spread his own ideas. His followers were increasing daily. People argued in the streets. One church fought another. There was no peace in the empire and the situation kept becoming worse.

At last the emperor called an all-church council to be held in the town of Ephesus on the third day of June, 431. Cyril promptly went there with 50 bishops to defend the faith. Nestorius was already there with 16 of his followers. Two bishops and a priest were coming from Rome. The bishop of Carthage could not come because there were wars in Africa, but he wrote a letter urging that the ancient faith be kept. No bishop could come from Armenia either. The catholicos then was Saint Sahac and he was having difficulties with the Persians. Several other bishops were to come from Antioch, the home town of Nestorius, and these were known to be on the patriarch's side. In fact, they were not in favour of the meeting at all. Two weeks passed. The bishops from Antioch did not arrive. The other bishops could wait no longer.

On the twenty-second day of June the council opened, under the presidency of Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. That same day Nestorius was condemned as a teacher of falsehoods. It was a hot summer day. As the bishops came out of the meeting, gaily dressed men and women greeted them with incense and perfume and accompanied each to his own residence.

The third session of the meeting was held on the eleventh day of July. By then all those who were coming had arrived, including the bishops from Antioch. But these had gone to another meeting of forty-three bishops held in favour of Nestorius. At the council where Cyril was president one hundred and ninety-eight bishops signed a letter to the emperor informing him of

their decision against the patriarch. Later the bishop of Antioch saw his error and exchanged with Cyril the kiss of peace.

Nestorius had all the roads to Constantinople blocked. He saw to it that the emperor did not receive any news of the council. Yet the emperor suspected trouble and sent commanders to Ephesus with orders to arrest Nestorius, Cyril and the bishop of Ephesus and post soldiers at their doors. In the meantime a secret agent dressed like a beggar carried the message of the orthodox bishops to His Majesty in the hollow of a cane. A very famous abbot, Dalmatius, who had not left his monastery for the last fifty years, came out on this occasion. He convinced the emperor that the Council of Ephesus had taken the right decision.

In Constantinople there was a great procession to the cathedral with two rows of monks chanting psalms. There the decision of Ephesus was read and the emperor confirmed it. A new patriarch occupied the throne of the cathedral on the twenty-fifth day of October, 431. Nestorius was exiled.

Two months later a bishop in Alexandria preached with Cyril's permission: "Thus Mary, *the Mother of God*, brings forth Emmanuel," he said. People interrupted the sermon to shout their approval saying: "Lo, this is the faith!... This is what we wanted to hear!..."

It was a happy day, a day of triumph for Cyril of Alexandria.

Introduction to Story XIV

We spoke in the introduction to Story XI of the agreement whereby Theodosius I of the Greek empire and Shapur III of Persia had divided Armenia between them. The last king of *Western* or Greek Armenia was Arshac who died childless. The Greek consul who took charge of the government of this part of our land was to share his authority with a representative of the Armenian nakharars or grandees. The first Armenian representative to fill this post was Gazavon. These were the developments in *Eastern* or Persian Armenia:

King Khosrov of Eastern Armenia enjoyed the sympathy of most of the grandes, of whom Gazavon was one. Having consequently conceived the plan of reuniting the two parts of Armenia under one rule, he tried to convince the Greek emperor of the feasibility of such a project, provided the emperor would promise him the necessary military help if and when they would have to meet Persian opposition. The plan would, in every way, serve the Greek interests. But the emperor was a poor strategist; nor was he particularly anxious to help another Christian country, even though he himself took great pride in the same religion. He refused to agree to come to Khosrov's assistance in the event of hostilities, but did allow Khosrov to extend his nominal rule over Western Armenia. In the meantime some Armenian grandes had reported to the Persian king Khosrov's dealings with the Byzantine emperor. Shapur (or his son) had Khosrov thrown into the Dungeon of Oblivion as we have already seen. Khosrov was succeeded by his brother Vramshapouh. At the latter's death in 414 Persia was under the rule of Yazdegerd I.

Yazdegerd I is known to the Persians as "Yazdegerd the Sinner". He was a capable, intelligent, broadminded king. He gave freedom to the Christians and Jews in his empire and allowed them to have their own religious organizations. He even tried to introduce a policy of what we may call "separation of church and state". This was too liberal

a step for the bigoted nobles of the realm, and eventually they had him killed.

Yazdegerd had allowed the return of Khosrov to Armenia on the intercession of Saint Sahac. But by now the Armenian king was an old man and he died within the year. Yazdegerd's son, Shapur, was made King of Armenia in Khosrov's stead. He was instructed to do everything in his power to befriend the Armenian nobility. He did not succeed in this mission during the four years of his reign which was terminated by his hurried return to Ctesiphon in order to occupy the Persian throne left vacant by Yazdegerd's death in 420. He was killed shortly after his arrival in the capital.

Persian Armenia was now left without a ruler. A period of almost total anarchy followed. To put an end to this undesirable situation Saint Sahac sent a delegation to Ctesiphon to ask the Persian "king of kings," who was now Bahram V, to appoint a ruler over Armenia. He consented to have our land ruled, at least nominally, by Vramshapouh's son, Artashir.

The Persians refer to Bahram V as "Bahram the Wild Ass" which is meant to be a compliment. He did not wish to be a "sinner" like his predecessor, and started a furious persecution of the Christians and Jews. It is to this "wild ass" that the Armenians went to denounce their own king, Artashir, and to ask for his removal. Artashir was not, to be sure, a model of virtue nor was he competent. But a "sick lamb" ought to have been preferred to a "healthy beast" as Saint Sahac put it. Artashir was removed from the throne in 428. This brought to an end the rule in Armenia of the ARSACID DYNASTY. We recall that the Persian Sassanians had sent Anac to Armenia to execute the Arsacid, Khosrov the Great. For over two hundred years the Sassanian wish had been to wipe the Arsacids off the face of the earth. With the forced abdication and death of Artashir that dream was realized.

In the year 422 Bahram V signed a treaty with the Greeks permitting the Christians to worship their God in his land. In return the Greeks agreed not to persecute Mazdeism in their Christian empire. Bahram's son, Yazdegerd II, succeeded his father in 438. He broke the treaty with the Greeks and launched several attacks against them. Then he turned against the non-Persian peoples of his own realm. His grand plan was to unify the empire religiously and otherwise, consolidate his army and then proceed against the Greek empire. The secret ambition of nearly every Sassanian ruler had been to recapture and

surpass the glory of Cyrus the Great who in the fifth century B.C. had reached the mainland of Greece but had failed to conquer that land. In order to realize this plan, Yazdegerd II had also to repel the invasions of the Huns from the north. For this reason he refortified a strip of land between the Caucasian mountains and the Caspian Sea. This fortified area was known as "the defense line of Djor".

The Christian Armenians were a thorn in the side of Persia. Yazdegerd felt that they were in the way of his grandiose plan and he was supported in this opinion by his commander-in-chief, Mihr-Nerseh, one of the greatest politicians and military leaders that Persia has ever known. Both king and commander were fanatic Mazdeists and felt duty-bound to convert to their own religion all the peoples within their reach. Actually Armenia, sensitive to movements that marked human progress, had placed the possibility of social improvement (which the Persians considered a threat) at the doorstep of the Persian empire. By the same token Armenia was a bulwark against the expansion westward of Persian obscurantism.

At the time Persian Armenia was governed by *marzpans*, that is, commander-consuls or "markgraves" appointed by the Persian king. In 422, an Armenian, Vassac Sewny, became the marzpan. He was ambitious, wily and unprincipled. The only ends he pursued were his own egotistic interests and those of his house; and the sole purpose of the intrigues in which he engaged profusely was to pass the Armenian crown to his own dynasty. He had been a prisoner of the Persians in his youth and had never liked them; but he knew the art of dissimulation. Coldly and ruthlessly he did whatever he thought was advantageous to himself during the critical and troubled years of his marzpanship. In the end he failed miserably.

Vassac Sewny was a representative of the Persophile party in Armenia. Against them were those who relied on their own resources, hoping that the Greeks would come to their aid when the hour struck. This hour came, but the Greeks did not help. Yazdegerd decided to force the conversion of Armenia to Mazdeism. For twenty-two years the Armenians had submitted to oppression. But a threat to their faith aroused them to resistance, regardless of every other consideration. Vardan Mamiconian, our national hero, personified this resistance to the death. The catholicos, Hovsep (Joseph) of Hol'otzim and L'evond Yerets ("Priest") represented the church in whose bosom the resistance took place.

THE ARMENIANS
DEFEND THEIR RELIGION
(THE STORY OF THE VARDANIANS)

The powerful king of Persia, seated on his gilded throne, was listening to his advisers. He was a big man, had a large nose and large eyes slanting downward. He had a thin beard which did not even grow long enough, and this made him unhappy. But he enjoyed being feared by the people. They called him "a wild bull" or "an angry lion". His name was Yazdegerd.

On that day he was very much satisfied with himself. His armies had beaten the Kushans, an enemy people, and this victory had made Yazdegerd even more terrible and more famous. He was sitting on his throne enjoying the news of the victory and dreaming of more victories to come. A beautiful sun was shining outside and the trees had begun to bud. Yazdegerd turned to the general of his armies, Mihr-Nerseh, who was also his chief adviser:

"What about the Armenians?" he said, pointing with his left hand in the general direction of the northern side of the world. Before the general could answer, the chief magus (the high-priest of the king's religion) gave his own opinion:

"We must make the Armenians accept *our* religion," he said.

The Persians used to worship a god whose name was Ormizd.

"Unless you turn the Armenians to *our* own religion," the chief magus went on, "Ormizd will be angry with you and he will not give you any victories over your enemies any more!"

The king sat up. "And what is *your* opinion?" he said to the general, addressing him for the second time. The general was an old man. He had many years of experience in government, in battle and in all sorts of wily affairs. He too was a Mazdeist, that is, a worshipper of Ormizd, of the sun and of fire. What

the chief magus had said had pleased him, and he knew what the king wanted.

“Surely, that is the will of Ormizd,” he agreed. “We must turn the Armenians to our religion. All of the empire must be like one man worshipping the same god. We shall have a much stronger army and we shall go and conquer—who knows?—perhaps the Byzantine empire itself!” As he spoke these last words the eyes of the general and the eyes of the king and the eyes of the chief magus shone and became dreamy. They grinned and winked at each other and moved their heads up and down.

Now in the middle of the fifth century the Persian half of Armenia was governed by a *marzpan*. One of the jobs of a *marzpan* was to collect taxes from the Armenian lords. He also had to get from them a number of horsemen. He would send the taxes to the Persian king, and the horsemen were put to the service of the Persian army.

The king of Persia wanted to have the Armenians change their religion without war, so as to spare his own men. “I should promise to reduce their taxes and the number of horsemen I want,” he said to himself, “then perhaps they will like me better and do as I say.” He sent his servant Tenshapur to Armenia to make these promises. He also wrote a letter to the Armenians and had one written by Mihr-Nerseh about their religion.

“I bring to you,” Tenshapur said to the Armenian lords, “the greetings of the great king. He promises to collect less taxes and he promises to reduce the number of horsemen that you have to give to the Persian army every year.” The Armenian lords were happy and grateful for a moment, but then the threat came: “he will do these things,” Tenshapur continued, “if you obey what he and Mihr-Nerseh say in their letters.” The Armenian lords felt cheated. What the king and Mihr-Nerseh said in their letters was unacceptable. They were being asked to change their religion, to give up Christianity.

Tenshapur stayed and worked in Armenia for over a year trying to weaken the will of the people and to destroy the country; but no matter how much he oppressed them, the Armenians

would not give up their religion. In the meantime life became unbearable. The Armenian lords and bishops decided to hold a meeting to find a way out.

This very important meeting took place in the city of Artashat. The catholicos Hovsep (or Joseph) of Armenia, nearly all the bishops, many priests and many monks, many lords, princes and the prominent men of the land were there. The most venerable among the priests was Leond the Priest whom we know as L'evond Yerets; the most prominent among the lords and nakharars was Vardan Mamiconian.

The Council of Artashat met mainly in order to answer the two letters of the king and of the general. Those present at the meeting knew that the future of their country depended on the answers they would make to these letters. They talked together very seriously and for a long time. Then they decided what had been in their minds all along. They wrote to the king and they said: "We are ready to serve you; we are ready to put to your disposition all we have; we are even ready to fight for you and to shed our blood for the empire . . . but when it comes to our eternal salvation, there is nothing you or your priests can do . . . your religion is a lie and should be laughed at . . . ours alone is true and teaches the love of God and of men . . . we cannot worship the sun and the moon and the wind and fire."

Then the bishops wrote another letter to Mihr-Nerseh in which they explained their reasons for refusing to accept the Persian religion. It did not matter *whose* religion it was. The Armenians could not turn to it because it was not *true*. They would rather believe in the truth and die, than live with a false religion. We can only choose the truth, the Armenians said. "From this faith nothing can shake us, neither angels, nor men, nor sword, nor fire."

When the Persian king received the answer of the Armenians, he was both angry and amazed. "How dare the Armenians oppose *me*? What makes them so courageous?" he asked himself. Then he and Mihr-Nerseh and the chief magus decided

to call the Armenian lords to the capital. The king would talk to them personally.

With the blessings of Catholicos Hovsep the Armenian lords prepared for their journey and arrived in Ctesiphon on the fifteenth day of April, 450. Yazdegerd received them coldly. He offered them nothing but threats, but the Armenian lords were not afraid.

Vardan Mamiconian spoke up on behalf of all present. He said that they had been, were and would go on being the king's loyal subjects, but that their religion was a matter of conscience and that they could not change it as people change their shirts. The king shook with rage. He repeated his threats several times and ordered his attendants to take them away.

The wives and children of the Armenian nakharars, and all the people were left without leaders back in Armenia. If the Persian king exiled them to the desert as he said he would, and if the Persian army marched upon their land, their people would surely be slaughtered. Finally they decided to *say* that they would change their religion, but they would not change it in their hearts. And so they did.

The king of Persia was satisfied. He called the Armenian lords his "friends" and gave them expensive gifts. He was fooled. There were great preparations made for the Mazdeistic worship of the Armenians. It was going to take place the next morning, at sunrise. They were all going to worship the sun and fire.

The ceremony took place in the big temple. Yazdegerd himself was there wearing a crown that looked like a miniature castle. On top of the crown in the center were a half moon and a golden globe. Also present was the chief magus, along with many magi. With their mouths covered, they went round and round a fire which burned on a heap of ashes in a brazier placed in the exact middle of the temple. When the sun came up, the king and the high priest and the magi and the people worshipped it. They were all looking at the Armenian lords out of the corners of their eyes. The latter were going through the motions,

but in their hearts they were worshipping God and asking Him to forgive their sins.

Vardan Mamiconian and the other lords could now return to Armenia. The king ordered seven hundred magi and many horsemen to go along with them. They were ordered to tear down the Armenian churches and build fire temples instead, to send all the gold and silver of the churches to Persia and to teach Mazdeism to the sons and daughters of the noblemen and of the people.

The magi formed a happy caravan. They were divided into different groups and were making decisions, in a carefree way, as to which group would teach where. They arrived at the town of Angl' on a Sunday and tried for the first time to carry out their duties. Then they learned the facts.

Hundreds of Armenians armed mostly with nothing but sticks and stones gathered together under the command of the aged but vigorous L'evond Yerets and went to the defense of their church. The battle was short and decisive. The multitude of the magi was defeated. They broke up and fled. Their chief could barely escape death. He really knew, then, that it was quite foolish to try to turn the Armenians from the Christian religion and that all the power and all the threats of his king were of no avail.

Introduction to Story XV

The battle of Avarayr took place on May 26, 451. Avarayr is the name of a small village in the field of Shavarshan, situated in the Armenian province of Artaz. That field, now known as Macu, is irrigated by the tributary Tl'mout (Deghmoor) of the river Araxes or Yeraskh. The Armenian army under the general command of Vardan Mamikonian had taken position on the left bank of Tl'mout. The Persians had arrayed themselves on the right bank, and outnumbered the Armenians three to one. Their reserve corps relied on the might of its elephants which were, in those days, the equivalent of our heavy tanks. The fact that the scene of the battle was a flat piece of land was to the advantage of the Persians. This facilitated the movement of their elephants against the Armenians whose military excellence was particularly evident not in fields but in mountainous regions. The Armenians were thus at a considerable disadvantage when the battle started, and all the more so in view of the fact that the Armenian marzpan, Vassac Sewny, was treacherously fighting on the side of the enemy with his troops of nearly forty thousand men. It was therefore an almost foregone conclusion that the clash would end in a military defeat for the Armenians. But to regard the battle of Avarayr as a purely military venture is a gross mistake.

No event sheds more light on the history of the Armenians than this battle which did not last more than a day. It is significant as the culminating event of a series of developments which we shall outline presently. These developments are most complex in nature inasmuch as they include:

a) the determination of the Armenian people, led by the church, to resist unconditionally any and all efforts by the Persians to assimilate the Armenians through a change of their religion. This determination ended in victory.

b) a civil war among two factions. The moment had come to have a showdown between those who, headed by the church and the Mami-

conian house, wanted to tie the cultural and religious destiny of Armenia with the Christian West; and those who, headed by Vassac Sewny, wished to carry the land into the camp of Mazdeistic Persia. Victory remained on the side of the former.

c) the downfall of Vassac, a shrewd and eminent man, the marzpan of Persian Armenia. This was due to a tragic flaw in his character, namely pride. It was his pride which made him inconsistent and a traitor to his land. He had visions of wearing the crown as King of Armenia. He ended his days in the dark dampness of a jail, his living body serving as food to worms. Before his death he was periodically brought to the market place so that people might spit at him.

d) the sanctification of a military leader because he put his military competence to the service of Christ. The nation bestowed upon him its highest honor by making him its national hero. Saint Vardan the Brave fell on the field of honor because he knew full well that that was the price to be paid for the salvation of his people. He paid that price knowingly and willingly. His death was "death understood". He was joined in his glory by one thousand and thirty-five comrades-in-arms.

e) the sanctification of a priest, L'evond Yerets, who was the soul of the movement of Christian resistance. He was also a prophet in the sense that he did not let worldly considerations interfere with the implementation of his basic convictions. He had the blessings of Catholicos Hovsep of Hol'otzim. Martyred in the wilderness—so that their people might not obtain their relics—were, besides Catholicos Hovsep and L'evond Yerets, two bishops: Sahac and Thathic, three other priests: Mousheh, Arshenn and Samuel, and two deacons: Kachach and Abraham.

The battle of Avarayr was the practical application by a whole people of two basic precepts of Christianity: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal"; and "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

We know that when the nakharars returned to Armenia in the early summer of 450 they had ostensibly changed their faith. This confused their own people who did not know the facts, and made the nakharars themselves uncomfortable. They could not disclose the facts to their compatriots without arousing Persian suspicion. Vardan decided to leave the country, but Vassac joined other dignitaries who

were dismayed by Vardan's departure. They begged him to return, and he did. At a council held at Shahapivan the nakharars decided on armed resistance against the Persians. In the course of an attack against a concentration of magi, Vassac himself promised, under threat, to join the covenant-keeping nakharars. In the meantime the Persian army invaded ancient Albania, a friendly country to the north-east of Armenia. Vardan hastened to help the Albanians and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Persians. In the absence of Vardan, Vassac, while feigning to undertake the defense of the fatherland, informed the Persians on the moves of the Armenian army, and managed to break the Armenian-Georgian-Albanian alliance. Vardan rushed back to the central provinces of Armenia after securing the help of the Huns against the Persians. He also wished to secure the help of the Christian Greeks. Vassac signed the requests for help, at the same time promising his assistance to the Persians who were making ready to strike. The Greeks not only refused to help, but assured Ctesiphon of their neutrality. Vassac also obtained from the Persians a promise of religious freedom. His purpose was to dissociate the people from the church and make the resistance appear a purely political rebellion. He did succeed in winning over to his side several nakharars. During the heavy winter of 450-51 all military movements ceased. The Armenians were left entirely to their own resources, and they had to contend not only with a mighty enemy, but with an important section of their own people. In a situation of extreme tenseness all parties waited for the spring and made ready for the inevitable clash.

After the battle of Avarayr resistance continued. Yazdegerd knew that his efforts to convert the Armenians to Mazdeism were futile, but his anger had not subsided. Many nakharars, among them Vassac, became the victims of his frustration. The Leondians (that is, the clergymen who were with L'evond Yerets) were martyred on July 25, 454.

We owe our detailed knowledge of these developments to two of our outstanding historians of the fifth century: Lazar of Pharbi, and Elisaeus or El'ishé (Vardapet). The poetic quality of the latter's account, in particular, has seldom been matched in ancient world literature. It is largely through him that we have come to evaluate Vardan's heroism. He has telescoped in that battle, as it were, the entire history of the Armenian people.

OUR NATIONAL HERO

(THE STORY OF VARDAN MAMICONIAN)

The first boy who learned the Armenian alphabet after it was invented was probably Vardan Mamiconian. His teacher must have been his grandfather, Catholicos Sahac. Vardan's father was Hamazasp, the sparapet or commander-in-chief of Armenia. Vardan himself grew up to be a brave soldier and a true Christian. He had read the Bible in Armenian many times over. He had read other books written or translated by his friends. Every new book was an occasion for him to remember once more his first Armenian lesson and his immortal teacher.

The king of Persia honored Vardan as the commander-in-chief of the Armenian armies. The emperor of the Greeks made him a viceroy. But his greatest ambition was to be as good a Christian as his grandfather, and he was always ready to serve the Armenian people. He was dedicated to the proposition that one cannot serve one's people well without serving Christ at the same time.

In the middle of the fifth century the situation in Armenia was quite intolerable. By the year 450 Vardan had to practice his religion in secret on account of the Persians who were persecuting the Christians. The *marzpan* or governor of Armenia, Vassac, was himself a double-dealing friend of the Persians. The time came when Vardan no longer wished to stay in the country, but a delegation of Armenian notables begged him not to leave.

One of the members of that delegation was L'evond Yerets. This great priest could not stand the presence in Armenia of hundreds of magi who were busy spreading their false religion. He needed Vardan's support to tell the Persian king that the Armenians were quite ready to serve in the Persian empire, but

that they could not change their religion. The magi must therefore go home. If they do not leave, L'evond Yerets insisted, the Armenian army must *drive* them out. The catholicos agreed with him. So did other bishops. So did Vardan Mamiconian and other nakharars. They held a meeting where Vardan Mamiconian was the president. "How long shall we suffer this?" he cried. "How long shall we cover the truth? . . . for if we are not ready to show the whole world where we stand, we shall perish!" When they came out of that meeting, the bishops and the lords and the people of Armenia knew where they stood and they were ready to declare it to the whole world. Vardan Mamiconian began to chase the magi out of the country, against Vassac's will. He then went to help the Christian Albanians against the Persians. He won a brilliant victory and the Persians were worried. Meanwhile Vassac was busy informing the enemy of what transpired. He was working with the Persians for Vardan's defeat. When the sparapet returned to Armenia, it was almost winter. Nothing much could be done in the bitter cold of the Armenian mountains. Everyone was waiting for the spring, full of anxiety.

When it came, the Persians, with Vassac and his men on their side, massed their soldiers in the field of Shavarshan, on the bank of the river Tl'mout, near the village of Avarayr. They were determined to crush Vardan Mamiconian and make of Armenia a pagan country, again.

On the night of May 25, 451, the Armenians too were there in the field of Shavarshan, opposite the Persians, ready to fight back. There was no fear in their hearts.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," said a soldier.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures," answered another.

There were sixty-six thousand Armenian soldiers. They were divided in small groups. They said all the psalms. Many had brought food with them. They shared it with those who did not have enough to eat. There were many priests and those men who were not baptized received that sacrament: "tonight we

shall be baptized with water, tomorrow with blood," they said. They were all encouraging each other.

The presence of Vardan Mamiconian was felt everywhere. They all obeyed him not only because he was the commander, but also out of love. He was mindful of the smallest need of the least soldier. He wanted to make sure that everyone had enough arms to defend himself. Then he met with the staff. He divided his men into three divisions. He gave the command of the right wing to Khorenn Khorkhorouni; the command of the central division he trusted to Nershapouh Ardzrouni. He himself took the command of the left wing, because he was informed that the right wing of the enemy was commanded by Vassac. Vardan formed a reserve corps in the back and gave its command to his own brother, Hamazaspian. Then he spoke to his comrades-in-arms:

"I have fought many battles, and you have fought with me. Sometimes we have bravely defeated the enemy and sometimes he has defeated us; but we were victorious more often than not. . . in those wars the men who ran away made a bad name for themselves . . . and received the punishment of death; and those who bravely thrust themselves forward won fame for their bravery and received great rewards from the king who is, himself, only a mortal . . . Here we are, each one of us with many wounds and scars on our bodies . . . Now, if we performed these acts of bravery for the mortal commander, how much more should we do for our Immortal King who is the Lord of the living and of the dead and who will judge men according to their works . . ."

Vardan the Brave spoke with great enthusiasm. His voice would rise and fall in the silence of the night and with each one of his words his men grew more courageous. "We banished doubt from us long ago," he said, "and now, let fear run away from our minds and from our thoughts."

Catholicos Hovsep was there, too, along with many bishops and priests. The most prominent among them was L'evond Yerets. He it was who, with the permission of the catholicos,

addressed the soldiers. He reminded them of the brave deeds of their forefathers and of the brave deeds of the people of the Old Testament. He reminded them of the death of Jesus Christ for the sake of the sinful men of the world. "Likewise," he said, "we must sacrifice ourselves for the sake of His immortal power."

Dawn was not far off now. Some tried to rest; others prayed; still others engaged in small talk. Many recited the psalms for as long as they could keep their eyes open. One could see in the distance the shadows of the huge Persian army. They too were divided into three divisions and each division was as large as all of the Armenian divisions put together. And they had elephants. Each elephant had a small tower built on his back.

The morning of the 26th of May came. When it was light enough for men to recognize each other, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Armenian camp. Many were going to receive the holy communion for the last time.

Then the horn sounded. Sixty-six thousand men were ready and burning with the same enthusiasm. The commander-in-chief gave the order to advance.

It was customary in those days to let out a war cry as soldiers ran to meet the enemy. The Persians were shouting at the top of their lungs, like beasts gone berserk, every one of them, from the commander Moushcann Nussalavourt to the last helper of the last cavalryman.

When the two armies met, it was like two clouds clashing and the swords and the arrows and the helmets and the shields shone in the first rays of the sun, and it was a scene of thunder and lightning.

Forward! Across the river! Strike! The voice of Vardan Mamiconian rang through the entire army as it was picked up by each captain. The Armenians took the offensive and hosts of thousands sped across the shallow river, running or riding. The commander-in-chief was leading the first men across. The mere sight of his white horse coming at them like a vision

struck the Persians with panic. The carnage lasted for hours. The field was strewn with men dead and dying and the waters of the river were red with blood.

Vardan saw that the enemy was confused, and thought for a moment that the Persians were routed. Then he faced the elephants. He had fought with the Persians many a time and he knew their tactics. He had also fought against elephants. He knew that when these animals are wounded they become wild and it is impossible to control them. If he could stab three or four, the whole drove of them would go mad and perhaps turn against their own masters. Few of Vardan's soldiers could keep up with him; as he was about to attack a formation of elephants he found himself isolated and surrounded. Arrows were flying at him and at his horse from the little towers built on the backs of the elephants. He was about to rip the circle and dart out, when a heavy arrow hit him on the chest.

The news of Vardan's death spread through the Armenian army like a black smoke driven by the winds. He was the spirit of the fight. Now that he had fallen, the Armenians began to retreat. They continued to fight in the mountains, but they could no longer defeat the Persians.

Some three years later L'evond Yerets, Catholicos Hovsep, and other bishops, priests and deacons were martyred in the wilderness. The Persian executioners were ordered not to let the Armenians have even their relics. But an Armenian-speaking Persian merchant, Khouzhic, brought these relics back. Without him we would not have known the story of the courageous martyrdom of these saints.

As to Vassac, when the Persian king found out that he had been a hypocrite and traitor to his own people, he condemned him to jail and there he died of an atrocious sickness.

Vardan and his one thousand and thirty-five comrades and the catholicos and the bishops and the priests and the deacons achieved what they had set out to achieve. In the long run the Persians gave in. Armenia remained a Christian country.

Introduction to Story XVI

Catholicos Hovsep, who had played a leading role in the events that culminated in the battle of Avarayr, was martyred three years after that battle. He was succeeded, according to reliable historians, by Melité of Manazcairt. The pontificate of Melité began in 452 and probably lasted until 456. Although we have no certain knowledge of his activities, he may have opposed the movements of open resistance to anti-Christian forces. He was succeeded by Moses of Manazcairt who died in 461. Moses in turn was succeeded by Gute of Araheza. Gute is one of the more important clergymen of our history. During the peaceful portion of his reign he tried to counterbalance the effects of a policy initiated by King Peroz of Persia. The latter, having despaired of converting the Armenians to the Persian religion by force, was trying now to win them over through corruption. Peroz did not punish the Christians. Instead, he rewarded profusely those among the nakharars who embraced the Persian religion or generally served the Persian interests without regard to the legitimate claims of their own people. This brought about the injustice and moral laxity which Catholicos Gute condemned. Denounced by certain nakharars, he was summoned to Ctesiphon for trial.

The party of Christian nakharars in Armenia who put loyalty to Christ above any benefits that might accrue to them from subservience to Persia were known as the “covenant-keepers”. Those who sacrificed Christianity to political or other advantages were the “covenant-breakers”. The designation “covenant-keeper” combined happily two meanings: it designated those who were, on one hand, faithful to the New Covenant inaugurated by the coming of Christ and had not, on the other hand, broken the oath that all the nakharars had taken at Artashat, with L'evond Yerets and Vardan Mamiconian, to defend Christianity to the death. It goes without saying that the sympathies of Catholicos Gute were with the covenant-keepers. This was one of the charges brought against him by the Persian authorities. He an-

swered it saying that his support for the covenant-keepers did not stem from political expediency but from his religious convictions. He was also charged with having illicit dealings with Constantinople, the capital of the Greek empire. To this he replied that, having been a student in that city, he still communicated with his old friends and, moreover, was obliged to order from Constantinople ecclesiastical vessels which were not obtainable anywhere else. In line with their new policy the Persians promised him great rewards if he embraced the Persian religion. Gute laughed at the suggestion and was deposed from his pontifical duties. He retired to Othmus, but we have indications to the effect that he kept and exercised his religious functions inasmuch as he enjoyed the great respect of his people. He died in 478, at a time when Persian Armenia was in a political turmoil.

Gute of Araheza was succeeded by Hovhanness (John) Mandaouni. The greatest political event during the pontificate of Mandaouni is the spectacular rise to power of Vahan Mamiconian, an astute statesman and an exceptionally capable military commander. Motivated by Christian zeal and fervor, he gained a series of brilliant victories and wrested from the Persians, at the town of Nwarsac, the promise which had been the aim of his uncle, Vardan Mamiconian, to obtain: freedom to worship Christ.

Vahan Mamiconian's success was due primarily to his personal abilities and particularly to the strategy of guerilla warfare which he developed so as to be able to cope with the constantly superior forces of the Persians. Contributing factors were the encouragement that he received from the catholicos, and the internal weaknesses of both the Greek and the Persian empires. The situation then was as follows:

In Persia: The resistance of the Vardanians had caused Yazdegerd II to change his policy of persecution and forced conversion. Another factor which determined this change of policy was his need of the military support of the empire's minorities in order to stave off the constant inroads made by neighbouring tribes. Yazdegerd II died in 457. At his death the White Huns or Ephthalites were moving down from the steppes of central Asia. They invaded India from the northwest and Persia from the east. Yazdegerd's successor, Peroz, died in 484 while fighting these tribes. He is the one who had inaugurated the policy of corruption in Armenia and in other Persian dependencies. Peroz's brother, Balash, was in power when the treaty of Nwarsac was signed with Vahan Mamiconian. Balash continued to fight against the

White Huns but could not eliminate their threat. He was therefore deposed and blinded. In 488, two years before the death of Hovhanness Mandacouni, the Persian crown passed to Kavadh I who reigned for thirty-three years. We shall have to speak of him in the introduction to our next story.

In the Eastern Roman or Greek empire: The great religious event that occupied this empire in 451 was the Council of Chalcedon which made an important pronouncement to the effect that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures—one divine, one human—perfectly united. A vast section of the church did not accept this formula seeing in it a mild form of the heresy of Nestorius (see Introduction to Story XIII). Those who maintain, along with the Armenians, that Christ is of *one* divine-human nature are referred to as “Monophysites”. This religious controversy rocked the Greek empire in the fifth century and greatly affected its political history. The fact that the Greek empire was itself threatened by wild tribes added insecurity to insecurity. Marcian was emperor while the Chalcedonian controversies raged. He settled disturbances on the Armenian frontiers and died in 457. He was succeeded by Leo I who was known as “the Great” by the supporters of Chalcedon and as “the Butcher” by its opponents. Leo was followed in 474 by Zeno who issued a celebrated document, known as the *Henotikon*, in an attempt to reconcile the Diophysites (those who were willing to abide by the decision of Chalcedon) and the Monophysites. Zeno was succeeded in 491 by Anastassus, a convinced Monophysite. He fought against the Persians from 502 to 506. After four years of violent bloodshed it was decided to leave things exactly as they were before the start of hostilities.

All these events kept the great neighbours of Armenia busy with themselves and the Armenians were left in peace for a time. During the second half of his career, that is, after the treaty of Nwarsac in 484, Hovhanness Mandacouni gave the church a renewed life. He revised the old canons or church laws and introduced new ones relevant to the times; reorganized the old services of the Armenian church and created others. The final forms of our services go back probably to him. He is known mainly for his discourses and exhortations in which he deals with theological and moral problems. Hovhanness Mandacouni transferred the see of catholicos to the city of Dowin, the new capital of Persian Armenia, in 485.

He was followed by Babkenn I of Othmus in 490.

VICTORY AND PEACE

(THE STORIES OF VAHAN AND ST. HOVHANNESS)

Somewhere near Mount Ararat a group of Armenian nakharars were holding a secret meeting. The sun had set long ago. There were torches here and there, but one would have to look hard to recognize these men who had left their horses at a distance and were now sitting huddled together. They had fought in many battles side by side and knew each other very well. They thought they were all faithful friends.

"Well then, that is it," said one of the lords. "The Georgians will help us. *That* we know. The Huns are also going to send us horsemen. Even the Greeks might help us. It should be rather easy to beat the Persians this time," he went on, testing the cord of his bow.

The other nakharars were glad to hear this opinion but it was not enough. The man whose opinion would decide the matter had not yet spoken. He was Vahan Mamiconian. They all looked in his direction and there was a moment of silence.

"It is not enough to be brave," Vahan said at last. "We must also be clever. The enemy is strong. The Georgians are weak. The Greeks cannot be trusted. The Huns are not here yet. So our allies are either unreliable, or weak, or absent. How do you expect to win a victory?"

"We can beat the Persians by ourselves alone!" said a young man.

"We could," said Vahan, "but we are not united."

"We are!" they all answered as one man, or so it seemed.

"Then let us take an oath!" Vahan said.

Their chaplain, Father Athic, held out a Bible and they all promised on their honor to fight under the command of Vahan

Mamiconian for the sake of Christ and to free their people from Persian persecution. They decided to capture the Persian marzpan and the general of the Persian army the very next day and drive the Persian army out of Armenia.

The decision of the nakharars did not remain a secret for long. The Persians learned of it and they fled before the faithful nakharars made a move. But soon they returned, planning to take the Armenian commander and his comrades by surprise. There was a fierce battle near the village of Acori at the foot of Mt. Ararat. Nine thousand Persians against four hundred Armenians, and of these one hundred passed to the Persian side. There were over thirty Persian armed men against each Armenian soldier. The Persians were defeated all the same. The battle of Acori is one of our most clever and most heroic battles. The news of the brilliant victory spread over the Armenian territories and people were wild with joy. Happy too was the catholicos, Hovhannes Mandacouni. "At last we can have a little more freedom to worship our God," he said.

The defeat was a great insult to the king of Persia, but there was not much he could do then. It was winter, and it was impossible to fight in the high mountains of Armenia in the cold, snowy season.

No sooner had the snows melted and the trees become green again, than the king raised another army. He trusted its command to his best general.

On the 25th of April 482 the Armenians had filled the churches of the land. The nakharars had also gone to church with their wives and children. They were all wearing colorful dresses, for it was Easter. It was the season of joy because spring was there; because Christ had risen from the dead.

Suddenly the frightful news came like a dark cloud covering the sun. The Persians were marching up the provinces of Hehr and Zarevand to spread paganism, famine and death. There was no time to lose. Vahan gathered his men and came to receive the blessing of the catholicos before going to meet the

enemy. The catholicos himself mounted a horse. Then thousands of Armenian horsemen sped along, their flags fluttering in the wind and their lances held aloft. Clouds of dust followed their trail and guided those who walked or ran, to the battlefield.

This was the second battle against the Persians in the same field. Vahan's uncle Vardan had fought here thirty-one years ago. But this time the Armenians were victorious. The Persians were routed. They left their dead in the field and fled.

The catholicos blessed Vahan and his victorious soldiers. Thereafter the Armenian commander gained victory after victory. Once, not far from the village of Erez he was met by the enemy, four thousand strong. Under his command Vahan had no more than thirty-nine horsemen. They were forty men against four thousand. Vahan was a man of quick decisions.

"We must either die for our holy religion and receive the crown of martyrdom, or we must win the battle, as we always have, for one man can chase thousands . . ." he said. Then he gave the terrible command. Their horses neighed and shot on in the twinkling of an eye. No one could resist their precision and power.

The battle of Erez is the greatest and the most daring victory in the history of Armenia, and one of the most brilliant victories in the history of the world. Vahan's fame grew in all the lands. The mere mention of his name was enough to make the Persian king uncomfortable.

When Balash became King of Persia, he knew that there was only one way of dealing with Vahan and that was to ask him his conditions for peace. Vahan sent his message: "I will stop fighting your armies," he said, "if the Armenians are allowed to worship God freely; if responsible positions are given only to those who deserve them; and if the Persian king is willing to listen to serious complaints personally and make just and impartial decisions."

All of Vahan's conditions were presented at the village of Nwarsac and they were all accepted. Vahan then went to the

Persian capital as a royal guest. The day of his arrival was declared a holiday and banquets were given in his honor. Vahan asked the king officially to recognize the catholicos of Armenia.

“Anything you ask for shall be granted,” said the king.

Vahan returned to Armenia showered with gifts and honors.

The capital of Armenia was now Dowin. One day the bells of the cathedral began to ring unexpectedly. This was a sign of good news. People left their homes and their shops and before long the cathedral was crowded with worshippers. Catholicos Hovhanness Mandacouni was celebrating the Divine Liturgy. At the proper time he made the announcement: “Let us praise God for his infinite mercy,” he said. “Our great Vahan Mamiconian has been made our *marzpan* and commander-in-chief, and so we shall no longer be directly governed by a Persian.”

Some of the people could not help shouting their joy. Others fell on their knees to pray and to thank God. The catholicos went on with his sermon and preached with the words of Jesus in mind, to the effect that there is not much merit in loving one's friends, and that one must go beyond that and promote love by forgiving one's opponents.

We still have that sermon because our historian, Lazar of Pharbi, has written it down for us. Catholicos Hovhanness was not only a great preacher. He was also a specialist of church laws and a fine poet.

In 486 he called an important meeting and there he established new laws some of which are observed to this day. He decided how the services of our church should be held and how the sacraments should be performed. His instructions are still followed. He always rose early in the morning and never wasted his time. He wrote and preached, and travelled extensively so as to know his clergymen personally and govern the church better.

One day as he woke from his sleep Saint Hovhanness said a new prayer, then he wrote it down. It begins with the word

Zarthoutzyalks. "We who have awakened from the repose of sleep . . .," the prayer says, must thank God for watching over us and must pray that he keep us from temptation. This and other prayers that Saint Hovhanness composed have been intoned in thousands of Armenian churches ever since.

Five years before he died Saint Hovhanness had to make a difficult decision. Saint Gregory the Enlightener had established the see of catholicos in Val'arshapat. This was also the residence of the head of the state. Because the head of the state and the head of the church worked closely together, it had been convenient for them to have their residences near each other. Now the capital of Armenia was Dowin. Catholicos Hovhanness had to commute from Val'arshapat to Dowin quite often. Dowin was at a distance of about twenty-five miles from Val'arshapat, and there was a river in between. This made the round trip difficult and time consuming. There were no highways. Transportation was by horse, and twenty-five miles was a considerable distance. The catholicos decided to transfer his see to Dowin in order to be able to work longer and more efficiently. "The time will come when we shall be back in Val'arshapat," he must have thought as his throne was being moved.

Saint Hovhanness Mandacouni, one of the greatest fathers of our church, entered his eternal rest in 490. Vahan Mamiconian, his dear friend, died twenty years later.

Introduction to Story XVII

The Persian king Kavadh, whom we mentioned in our introduction to the previous story, adopted toward the Armenians the same policy of persecution as Yazdegerd II. His son Chosroes I Anushirvan ("the Blessed") was tolerant, but his subordinates did not always follow his instructions. The Persian marzpan Sourenn, for example, began to oppress the Armenians and in 571 invaded the city of Dowin with a horde of magi. Vahan Mamiconian had died in 510 but another Mamiconian, Vardan III, assembled the Armenian forces, determined to repulse any attack directed against their faith. He obtained promises of support from the Greek emperor. An assault on the Armenian catholicos by Persians in the street of Dowin provided the occasion for the onset against Sourenn and his forces. The defeat of the Persians was complete. Sourenn's body was unrecognizably lost in the slaughter.

New disputes about the status of Armenia and of the adjoining territories renewed the clash between the Greek and Persian forces. An armistice that had been signed in 562 between Justinian I and Chosroes was disregarded and in 575 the latter once more ravaged Cappadocia. His son, Hormuzd, tried to establish a policy of Persian-Christian co-existence. Hormuzd's son, Chosroes II, who permitted his own father to be executed, had to flee Persia and to seek Greek help against his own nobles. He re-ascended the throne with the help of the Greek emperor Maurice who is known to be "of Armenian descent". Maurice was murdered in Constantinople in 602 and the Persian Chosroes II declared a war of revenge against the Greeks. His armies were successful enough to reach the very heart of the empire and threaten Constantinople. In an even more spectacular counter-attack the forces of the Greek emperor Heraclius nearly penetrated Persia, which was in a state of political chaos. At last Yazdegerd III ascended the throne of Persia in 632. He was the last Sassanian king. In 651, exactly two hundred years after the battle of Avarayr which was launched, ironically enough, by a namesake of their last king, the

mighty Sassanians were wiped off the face of the earth by the Arabs. For over four centuries they had tried to subdue and assimilate their Armenian neighbours, in vain. In vain were thousands upon thousands killed on both sides.

The Greek-Armenian relationship between the pontificate of Hovhanness Mandacouni and that of Nersess III the Builder (who died in 661) is marked by interminable religious controversies, centered upon the Chalcedonian formula of the two natures of Christ. The Armenians, along with the other powerful eastern sees of the empire, rejected this formulation and insisted on Christ's having one nature, both human and divine. But it would be a mistake to think of these disputes as purely theological. Constantinople itself wavered between the two views and this was symbolic of its indecision between gaining the support either of the eastern population or that of the Western Roman empire, particularly that of the see of Rome which was gaining in power and stature as the centuries passed. The authorities of Constantinople tried more than once to reconcile the Western Diophysite and the Eastern Monophysite churches. The great Justinian (d. 565) favoured the Diophysite camp—in his fights against the Goths he needed the support of the Italians and of the bishop of Rome—while his wife, Theodora, a woman of considerable political influence, was a Monophysite. She encouraged, and gained the sympathy of, the eastern (Egyptian, Syrian and Armenian) populations, and this does not at all seem to have displeased her Diophysite husband.

A *theological* compromise was attempted by Patriarch Cyrus of Constantinople. He suggested, following his predecessor Sergius, that Christ had two natures but one will or energy or operation. The Greek emperor Heraclius supported this view wholeheartedly. The infallible Pope Honorius of Rome had no objection to it, but an equally infallible successor, Pope Agatho, condemned the teaching and Honorius with it. This was done at the sixth ecumenical council held at Constantinople in 681.

The Council of Chalcedon was officially condemned in Armenia under Catholicos Babkenn in a meeting held at Dowin in 506 and, again, in 508. The ground of the condemnation was that "Chalcedon perpetrates the falsehoods of Nestorius and of like-minded men." The Georgians and the Albanians, who received their theological guidance from the Armenian theologians, likewise condemned Chalcedon. We may note in this connection that the Syrians also followed the

Armenian lead in matters of faith. Around 550 the Syrians requested from Catholicos Nersess of Bagrevand (548-557) the ordination of their bishop, Abdisho, and they usually sought the arbitration of the Armenians in settling their internal theological disputes.

The next important Armenian catholicos is Moses of Elivard (574-604) who fixed the Armenian calendar. Then, under Catholicos Abraham of Al'bathan (607-615) the question of Armenian ecclesiastical orders was dealt with. During his pontificate Chosroes II occupied Jerusalem (where the Armenians had some seventy monasteries) and carried away the holy cross. This cross was later recaptured by Heraclius in his counter-attack mentioned above.

(The commander of the Armenian division of Heraclius' armies was Mezhezh Gnouni. The cross which the Christians liberated was carried in 629 to Carinn, to Constantinople and then to Jerusalem. The Armenian feast of the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross* is the commemoration of that event. It is celebrated on the Sunday closest to September 15 and is one of the five major feasts of the Armenian church. The others are: *Theophany*, i.e. the Birth and Baptism of Christ, *Easter*, the *Assumption of the Virgin*, and the *Transfiguration*.)

On the whole the religious oppression that the Armenians suffered at the hands of the Christian Greeks was not less insistent nor even less violent than that of the Persians. However, when Armenian military help was needed the Greeks would appear less fanatic and ready to negotiate. One such negotiation took place between Emperor Heraclius and Catholicos Ezr of Pharazhnacait (630-641). The emperor and the catholicos received communion together in an Armenian church in Carinn.

On the 6th of January 641 the Arabs occupied the city of Dowin. Twelve thousand Armenians were killed and thirty-five thousand carried away to serve the Arabs or to be sold as slaves. More will be said about the Arabs in the introduction to our next story. Their invasion marks the beginning of a new era in our history. The immediate problem created by their conquests was a question of loyalty: should the Armenians side with them or keep faith with the Greeks? The Armenian marzpan of that period, Theodore Rishtouni, adopted the former alternative. Catholicos Nersess the Builder (641-661) sided with the Greeks but he, too, changed his position toward the end of his pontificate.

NEW CHURCHES IN DIFFICULT TIMES

(THE STORY OF SAINT NERSESS THE BUILDER)

The 6th of January 641 was a sad, tragic Theophany ("Christmas") day for the Armenians. On that holy day the Arabs took their beloved capital. When they were through looting and pillaging, killing and destroying, the beautiful city of Dowin was an ugly sight to behold. There were twelve thousand dead. In addition thirty-five thousand more Armenians had been carried off by the Arabs as slaves.

The Arabs blew into Armenia with the force of a hurricane, and like a hurricane they seemed to be coming from nowhere. They had good and fast horses. They came wearing long, tattered robes, their heads covered with large pieces of cloth fastened with a band, and waving long, curved swords. One could see them from a distance covering the plains in disorderly fashion, galloping by the thousands in the wide field as if in a race, trying to outdo each other in speed and savagery. They came in endless numbers.

The Arabs were a new people with a new religion. They came from Arabia and for many many years nothing seemed to be able to stand in their way.

Now the Armenians no longer feared the Persians because the Arabs had destroyed the Persian empire. The Arabs were not as anxious as the Persians to have the Armenians change their religion. They wanted, above all, their money and the good things of their land. At first they did not even care to *stay* where they came. They would kill people on their way, break doors and windows, tear things down, rob homes and shops and then disappear for a time.

There was a man in Armenia who learned very soon how to deal with the Arabs. His name was Theodorus Rishtouni. He was now the commander-in-chief of the Armenian forces. He was not in the capital when the Arabs ravaged Dowin. When Theodorus returned to the capital, he felt like a man who goes on a journey and comes back to see his house all burned down. People were wandering about in the streets half naked and hungry. They were left to themselves. There was no government and the catholicos had died. Theodorus knew there was only one bishop who would make a good catholicos in these troubled times. He considered the idea over and over again. "Yes," he said to himself, "Bishop Nersess is the man."

Bishop Nersess was a person of great education and limitless energy. He knew no discouragement. He never sat and wept over ruins. He always looked ahead. When he looked at a ruin, he thought: "we must build again!" As Theodorus thought of Nersess he became more and more enthusiastic. It was curious. One had only to *think* of Bishop Nersess to be filled with optimism about the future. The commander went about, gathered together all the nakharars and bishops he could find. Then they all went to Bishop Nersess' residence:

"We want you to become our next catholicos," they said.

Few Armenian catholicoi had reigned in such difficult times. Bishop Nersess was not sure he could carry such a heavy responsibility at any time, let alone at *this* time when the Greeks were far away and could not help, and the savage Arabs might return at any time and spread terror again. The nakharars and bishops were insistent. Bishop Nersess was not saying "Yes". In fact, doubtful thoughts crossed his mind. "I'll send these nakharars and bishops away, and then maybe I'll leave the town," he said to himself. At the same time he could hear something like a voice within himself: "This is a heavy responsibility, and you must accept it."

The first task that Catholicos Nersess had to perform was

heart-rending. The Arabs had left behind them many dead people in and around the city. They had to be gathered and buried. "These are all martyrs," he said to the people. He had a church built at the place of their burial. That was the first church he built, but it was not the most beautiful one. The most beautiful church he built is now known by people of many nations. We can tell how it looked when it was built from its foundations and from parts of the walls that stand to this day. It is known as *Zwarthnotz*—"Church of the Angels"—and it was built in memory of the angels that appeared to Saint Gregory the Enlightener.

The *Zwarthnotz* church was a modern church in those times. It had a daring design and was a marvel of engineering. Catholicos Nersess built many more churches. He built for the future. When he saw anything good destroyed, he refused to weep over it. He thought of repairing it. He thought of doing better than before. We know him as Nersess the Builder. Saint Nersess "built" things in many other ways.

One day he was presiding over the services at the Church of St. John in Bagrevand. He was sitting on his throne and the time came for the sharacan or hymn to be sung. In the Armenian church the sharacans are sung by two groups which stand on either side of the chancel, taking turns in singing each stanza. Before the last stanza they sing the doxology: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."

On that day the leader of the group on the right started the hymn. The group on the left was supposed to continue with the next stanza. Instead, there was a silence. The singers began to whisper things to each other; then the leader started to sing, but in a different tune. *This* tune the leader on the right did not know, and he sang a still different one in the hope that the other leader might continue properly this time. But by now the leaders were feeling hostile toward each other and each was trying to push his own tune.

The impatience of the catholicos kept mounting. Though many of the people did not know what was happening, the ignorance and disorderly conduct of the singers left him profoundly dissatisfied. There must be order in the Armenian church in the singing of sharacans, he thought. He knew of a famous musician whose name was Basil Jon and who was an abbot at the monastery of Shirac. Catholicos Nersess ordered Abbot Basil to come and see him and gave him these instructions:

“I have already talked about this at a meeting of the bishops, and they and I want you to take over the matter of orderly singing in our churches. The leaders of the choirs must no longer introduce unnecessary complications in their hymns. We do not sing in the churches to entertain the people. We sing in order to glorify God. It is not necessary for the singers in choirs to show off their voices. In fact, this is a sin. Nor must the choirs sing *any* hymn they want. You, therefore, as a good musician, must select the best sharacans now available, and only those shall be sung by our choirs. You will go from town to town to gather sharacans and to teach the people at the same time. Then it will be up to me to decide which among your selections will be sung each day. God help you and bless you in this important task.”

Abbot Basil Jon went to work. From then on, by order of the catholicos, only the “Jon-selected” hymns could be sung. Never again did unpleasant things happen as in the Church of St. John in Bagrevand.

Catholicos Nersess established the feast of the Cross of Varag that we celebrate to this day. Varag is the name of a mountain near the city of Van. A piece of the Cross of Jesus appeared there to two solitary monks, Thodic and Hovell, between the years 660 and 661. It had been worn by Saint Rhip-sime who was, as we may recall, persecuted and martyred by King Trdat of Armenia. The feast of the Cross of Varag is the celebration, every year, of that appearance.

Twice in the twenty years of his pontificate Catholicos Ner-

sess held important church councils. At one such council in 645 several church laws were established. One of these laws says, for example, that the bishop of one diocese should not interfere with the affairs of another diocese. In a second council held three years later the Armenian bishops took decisions on matters of faith.

The Greeks were not always helpful to the Armenians. In fact, they often oppressed them. Catholicos Nersess tried hard to make friends with them but found them too haughty. They wanted everything *their* way and it is impossible to make friends with people of that sort. Toward the end of his life Catholicos Nersess had to turn to the Arabs. They had been defeated once by Theodorus Rishtouni and it was now easier to deal with them. The Arab caliph had made Gregory Mamiconian the new governor and presiding prince of Armenia after Theodorus. There was a period of peace. The catholicos had new plans but death overtook him in the year 661.

Introduction to Story XVIII

Sebeos, an Armenian historian of the seventh century, refers to the Arabs as "Ishmaelites" or "the sons of Ishmael" which is a designation taken from the Old Testament. We know that Ishmael was the son of Abraham from Hagar. He would have enjoyed the right of seniority and taken Abraham's place upon the latter's death, were it not for the jealousy of Sarah, Abraham's wife, who pushed her own son, Isaac, into that position of privilege. As a consequence Ishmael and his mother, who was a maid, were banished from Abraham's household.

This story points to the common origin of the Arabs and the Hebrews, both of whom are Semitic peoples. Their ancestral home was the Arabian peninsula which is mostly desert. The inhabited areas of this peninsula were its large and small oases which nevertheless could hardly yield enough food for the sustenance of its inhabitants. The difficulties with which the natives had to grapple in order to obtain the bare necessities of life made of them hard and tenacious people; the scarcity of food compelled them to migrate in waves to the neighbouring, richer areas, overcoming resistance by force, if necessary. The Arab hordes that invaded Armenia in the seventh century constituted the last and largest outpouring.

The Prophet of Islam, Muhammed, had declared that Allah had revealed to him the obligation of *jihad* or holy war against the enemies of his new religion. Interestingly enough this revelation had come just in time to enable him to organize raids from his stronghold of Medina upon caravans traveling to and from Mecca. After a series of battles he took Mecca by means of force, threat, wit and the device of marriage. The holy city of Mecca became his headquarters and when he died in 632 A.D., his dream of making of the people of Arabia a unified force had largely been realized. This work of consolidation was perfected by the first caliph ("successor" of Muhammed), Abu Bekr,

even though he survived the Prophet by only one year. When Abu Bekr died, ten thousand Arab warriors were on their way to Syria.

Islam began its great conquest under the second caliph, Omar. In 635 the important Christian city of Damascus fell and thereafter the Arabs conquered land after land with incredible speed. Within a decade they had occupied Egypt, Iraq and Persia. By 732, after conquering all the African lands above the Sahara, as well as Spain, they threatened France, and Charles Martel was barely able to defeat them. In Asia they advanced as far as Turkestan, Mongolia and India. Yet they could never penetrate too far north. Islam seems to be a religion of warm and equatorial lands.

At least three causes made the rapid expansion of Islam possible: a) Islam was a fresh force fighting against the tired Greeks and Persians. The Arab nomads, though poorly armed with bows, arrows and light spears, fought with fanatic savagery. A warrior surviving a battle would keep eighty percent of the booty he made; if he died, he would go to Paradise there to enjoy everything he had dreamed of throughout his life; b) The Arabs fought on camels which were one of the fastest means of transportation known at the time; c) many peoples welcomed them, in order to be freed either of Persian or of Greek oppression.

By the ninth century the Arabs had achieved a very high degree of civilization, under the Abbasid dynasty. The pomp and wealth and culture of Baghdad, which had become the residence of the caliphate, reached its apogee during the reign of Harun-al-Rashid, the celebrated hero of *The Arabian Nights*, who died in 809. By that time signs of degradation were becoming evident in Arabia itself where the Omayyads, the opponents of the Abbasids, had always been favored.

When historians speak of Armenia "under Arab domination" they refer to the period extending from 654 to 859. We saw in the introduction to the last story that the Arabs had made their appearance in Armenia in 641, the year which marked the end of the Sassanian empire. At that time the Arabs were not organized well enough to settle in the country. They had come to plunder and to carry away spoils and slaves. They established a government at the city of Dowin in Armenia only when they realized that Armenia and the Armenians could be useful to them in their wars against the Greeks. The deputy chief of this government was known as the *ostican*. The first three osticans were Armenians. In 698 the Arabs took complete control with Muhammed-ben-Merwan, but even when the

ostican was an Arab he had an Armenian aide to whom he delegated responsibility for internal affairs.

The Armenians suffered severe persecutions and massacre at the hands of many osticans, and the more so as the conqueror needed more money to maintain vast territories, large armies and sumptuous palaces. But the Arabs also knew how to be tolerant and obliging. The major political problem of the Armenians was to find a way of living both with the Greeks and with the Arabs. Often they suffered merely because the Christian Greeks would incite them to revolt against their Moslem oppressors, and then they would withdraw their promised help out of cowardice, indifference or plain abject betrayal. The historian Sebeos is of the opinion that the Armenians would have fared better had their principalities known how to unite against the common enemy, whether Greek or Arab; modern historians, such as the French scholar J. Laurent, a specialist in that period of Armenian history, agree with Sebeos in his estimate. At any rate the Arabs never became the undisputed masters of the land. They could not occupy the mountainous regions and they knew no way of inducing or compelling the Armenians to embrace Islam.

The catholicoi of Armenia of that period played a very important role in guiding the country toward the sensible attitude of siding with the Arabs against the distant Greeks. The fact is that Arab domination was more favourable to the land; they did not interfere with the dogmas of the Armenian church when they were not persecuting Christianity; furthermore, the Arabs were governed by religious laws of their own which were not, of course, designed to meet the socio-legal needs of peoples of other faiths. This explains the reputed Moslem tolerance and the generally accepted fact that Islam is the most democratic of all the major religions of the world. The Moslem religion itself has no hierarchy of any kind; and Moslems allow the ministers of the non-Moslem minorities living in their lands to govern their people according to their religion—or at least they did so until comparatively recent times when political nationalism penetrated the Moslem masses.

One of the most important catholicoi of the period under consideration is Hovhanness (John) III of Ozoun. He is also one of the greatest of our clergymen. The present story will deal largely with his celebrated journey to Damascus. For more details about him see the introduction to Story XIX.

THE ARAB EMIR
AND THE ARMENIAN CATHOLICOS
(THE STORY OF SAINT HOVHANNESS OF OTZOUN)

There was a colorful procession along the main street of the city of Dowin. The year was 719. Many Armenians had come to the capital merely to see the procession and to take part in the services that were to follow. Above all, everyone wanted to see the new catholicos, Hovhanness III of Ozoun, who was known as "the philosopher" because of his great wisdom. In those times people who went to school studied arithmetic, geometry, music, the science of the stars, grammar, the science of debate and the art of speaking well and persuasively. Catholicos Hovhanness III had gone to the best schools in and out of Armenia and was a master in all these subjects. He was, moreover, a good theologian. He knew everything that people could know about God.

The people of Armenia had special reasons for being glad to have such an eminent man as the head of their church just then. The country was under the occupation of the Arabs and the Armenians felt that in these difficult times their wise catholicos would be able to govern the church as a good captain steers his ship on a stormy sea. This was the thought of many who were following the procession and of others who stood on both sides of the street to watch it move along.

It was a long procession. First came the bearer of a tall cross, wearing a robe with golden fringes. He was followed by the members of the choir each holding a candle and singing as they walked. The deacons had miniature tabernacles in their left hands, and they used their right hands to swing the censers that shone brightly with every movement. The priests and bishops wore copes or *shourchars* made of rich materials of different

shades and embroidered with gold or silver threads. A gentle wind would, every so often, blow out some of the candles held by the choristers. They would be embarrassed and they would try to light them again, but their embarrassment was unnecessary for hardly anyone looked at *them*. All the spectators were straining their necks to catch sight of the catholicos. He was the last person in the procession, and two priests held the hem of his cope.

The catholicos was the most luxuriously vested of all. He wore an emiporon over his cope, covering his shoulders and extending down in front and back. It was made of the finest material found in the country, and decorated with an intricate design of wheat and grapes embroidered with golden threads and studded with precious gems. One could occasionally see the bejewelled buckle of his belt which was made of silk, and from which hung a square piece of hard material covered with purple velvet. This was the *conkair*, bearing on enamel an oval picture of the Holy Mother of God on one side, and an embossed bead-work on the other, representing a lamb holding a banner with a cross. The conkair had silver fringes and a silver tassel at each one of its four corners. The catholicos held a metal staff with one hand and a cross in the other, all glittering each time he turned to one side or the other to bless the people as he passed slowly by. A ring of amethyst surrounded with small diamonds covered most of the little finger of his right hand.

As the procession moved toward the cathedral, more and more people, old and young, came running to kiss the cross that the catholicos held. As they looked at his face they could not help thinking: "how handsome he is!"

Catholicos Hovhanness III had such an impressive appearance that the historians who write about him make a point of mentioning it. The fame of his exquisite features spread in many countries and people heard about him in the distant capitals of the world.

Now when the Arab deputy-governor or *ostican* of Armenia, Abd-el-Aziz, reported to the grand emir of Damascus about

the conditions in the land, he described the catholicos to his chief in glowing terms:

“The patriarch of the Armenians is not only intelligent and learned; he will also delight your eyes, my lord. Never before has Your Excellency seen such a man!” he said.

The grand emir was a busy man. He ruled the entire Arab empire. He was an absolute monarch, which means that he could do as he pleased with his millions of subjects. He was also very wealthy. But even then he never wore ornate things. On the contrary, he dressed very simply and had a profound dislike for rich clothes and for those who wore them. After receiving the ostican’s report, “I must see this patriarch of the Armenians and teach him a lesson,” he said to himself. Then he turned to his secretary:

“Tell Walid to come and see me at once,” he said.

Walid was an Arab general.

“From this moment on, *you* are the governor of Armenia. Make ready to go there within a day. Your first responsibility will be to send the Armenian patriarch here for a conference. May Allah be with you,” the grand emir told Walid and within a month Catholicos Hovhanness III was in Damascus with several clergymen and attendants.

On the day of the conference the catholicos looked his glorious best, as the grand emir had wished. Hovhanness III put on his most sumptuous clothes, wore all his decorations and combed his hair with special oils. He used the same oils for his long, gray beard which he sprinkled with gold dust according to the custom of the day.

The grand emir and all his retinue were waiting in the palace. As the tall, broad-shouldered, magnificently arrayed catholicos walked in, there was a hush. All, including the grand emir, were spellbound. But the grand emir was a determined man and he rarely shrank from saying what he had in mind. No sooner had they greeted each other, than he invited the catholicos to sit by him and then, in the presence of all the dignitaries:

“I understand, Sir Patriarch,” he said, “that your prophet Jesus was a humble person and never wore elaborate garments. He liked simplicity and he recommended the same to his disciples. Surely, Jesus would not approve of your wearing these expensive clothes if he saw you. And yet you claim to be one of his followers, and to be able to teach his doctrines . . .”

“Your Excellency is right,” answered the Armenian catholicos. “It is true that our Lord practiced and preached the virtues of simplicity and humility. But he and his disciples had a power which we do not have. They had the power of working miracles. They did not have to wear special apparels because they could be easily distinguished by their spiritual power. They did not need signs that could be seen. We do. Even Your Excellency has to wear special insignia sometimes to show forth his authority. But in case Your Excellency wishes to know more, I will explain further, if the gentlemen who are with us will kindly withdraw.”

The grand emir made a gesture and he and the catholicos were presently left alone in the hall. Then Hovhanness III took off his outer garments. The grand emir saw with stupefaction what the catholicos was wearing underneath. It was a shirt made of camel’s hair and it pricked its wearer like hundreds of sharp needles. The skin of the catholicos was raw to the point of bleeding. The grand emir could not believe his eyes. He came and touched the coarse material.

“But how can you wear this? Only Allah can give a man patience enough to endure it,” he said.

“This is for me; to remind myself of the sufferings of Jesus Christ on the cross; to remind myself of my sins and my imperfections. The brilliant vestments that I wear on the outside are for other people’s eyes, to show them the authority of a prince of the church,” the catholicos explained.

The grand emir could not find anything to say. Suddenly he felt the warmest friendship for the catholicos who, as he now

knew, was a humble servant of the Lord. He wanted to do something for him.

"Ask what you will, and if it is within my power, I will grant it," he said.

"I will not ask Your Excellency for any favours for myself," the Armenian catholicos said. "But I would ask you to order that the Christians be left free in Armenia to practice the religion of their choice, and that the churches as well as the bishops, priests and deacons be not required to pay taxes. If you grant us these favours, my people and I will be loyal subjects of your government."

Catholicos Hovhanness III returned to Armenia after having obtained from the grand emir all his requests. Then the Armenians and the Arabs became friends for a time and lived in peace. Peace was what the catholicos wanted so that he might improve the condition of the Armenian church. Shortly after his return from Damascus he called a meeting which was held at Dowin. At least thirty Armenian bishops came to this church council, along with the Armenian assistant to the Arab governor, Ashot the Bagratide, and several other grandees. This council passed several canons or church laws. Catholicos Hovhanness is the first head of the Armenian church to have compiled a complete book of canons. He is even more famous for his *Discourses* or writings in which he explains the true faith. He has also written commentaries on the ceremonies of the church.

Catholicos Hovhanness III died in 728. He is one of the most revered saints of the Armenian church.

Introduction to Story XIX

By 728 A.D., the year in which Hovhanness III of Otsoun died, a religious and a political policy had been definitely adopted in Armenia. The *religious* policy concerned the attitude of the Armenian church toward the Council of Chalcedon. That council had been condemned previously during the reign of Catholicos Babkenn, but several attempts were made by the Greeks, often harshly, to have the Armenian religious authorities reconsider their position. After Hovhanness III such attempts were known to be doomed to failure. The *political* policy had to do with the attitude of the Armenians toward the Arabs. Hovhanness III discouraged revolts which would, indirectly at least, be in favour of the Greeks. Yet the word "policy" should not mislead us. We must not think of Armenia in the eighth century as a unified, homogeneous state. It was rather a loosely connected conglomeration of principalities (or nakhararships) in each of which a grandee or nakharar assumed as much independence as he could muster.

We said a word in our last story about the two warring Arab dynasties: the Omayyads and the Abbasids. The Omayyad headquarters was at Damascus from 661 to 750, and at Cordoba (Spain) from 756 to 1031. The Abbasid capital was Baghdad from 762 to 1258. It was with the Abbasids, therefore, that the Armenians had mostly to deal. In Baghdad as in Cordoba Arab civilization flourished considerably and played an important role in the cultural destiny of the Western world. But this civilization was made possible by the toil and sweat of millions of people, including the Armenians, who not only did not receive any kind of compensation for their labour, but were treated like cattle, tortured and killed by methods which, even according to the historians of the times, were indescribably inhuman. Above all, the Arabs wanted money. The main, often the only function of the ostican was to collect taxes. Whenever an assigned tax was exacted, the assumption was that still more could be squeezed out, and thus more taxes were reimposed. The Armenian nakharars

thus had every reason to revolt periodically. The country would at times be reduced to such an abject state of poverty that death would be preferable to life. At one time during the eighth century every Armenian of note, whether lay or clergyman, had to wear a chain of lead around his neck on which the taxes paid and the taxes due were stamped.

Besides terror, another means that the Arabs used to exact taxes was the threat of forced conversion into Islam. No responsible Arab was supposed to do this, since the fight of Islam was claimed to be against idolatry, and Muhammed himself had recognized Judaism and Christianity to be religions not of idolatry, but "of the Book", that is, revealed religions. Yet time and again the Armenians were forced to embrace Islam. In 774 the situation became altogether intolerable and Artavazd Mamiconian, followed by Moushel' Mamiconian, raised the standard of revolt. This served as a pretext, on more than one occasion, for savage Arab retaliation. Thousands of Armenians were tortured and executed or thrown into the river or into the lake and drowned. At the time of this revolt the catholicos was Sion I of Bavon. It is assumed that it was carried out without his consent which he probably withheld because the Armenian nakharars were not united in this dangerous enterprise.

As a rule the church did not abstain from rendering political services of intercession between the nakharars and the Arab authorities whenever she could do so. She also strove to have the people maintain high moral standards in those times of hopeless confusion. The tragic life of Bishop Stephen of Sewnik stands out in this connection. He was a man of great learning who had secretly travelled as far as Byzantium to learn Greek and Latin so as to read books in these languages and glean material from them for the defense of the doctrinal position of the Armenian church. He was also a noted interpreter of the Bible, as well as a fearless preacher. Once he publicly condemned a woman of loose morals who, in order to avenge herself, tried to induce her lover to kill the saintly bishop. The lover could not bring himself to commit the crime, whereupon she snatched the dagger from him and slew the bishop herself. A bitter remorse drove her subsequently to do penance. She descended into a hole in the ground which covered her up to her neck, lived uninterruptedly in that painful condition the balance of her life, and there she was

buried. A contemporary of Bishop Stephen was Sahacdoukht, the first Armenian woman choir soloist.

Thirteen catholicoi headed the Armenian church between Hovhanness III and Georg (George) II of Carni who died in 897. Several of these had very short reigns. Among the more prominent we may mention once more Sion I of Bavon who held a church council at Partav in or about 768. This council passed several canons which indicate something of the kind of life which the Armenians lived at that time. One canon forbids the monks to wander about from monastery to monastery, except on duty. Canon 20 stipulates that a sick child can be baptized "with the holy sign" if, due to circumstances beyond human control, a priest is not able to arrive on the scene before the child's death. The child will then be buried as one "among the baptized in Christ".

Catholico Yessayi (Isaiah) of Elipatroush (775-788) may be noted as one who climbed to the top position in the Armenian church from the humblest beginnings. His mother was a beggar at the door of the pontifical residence. When certain priests tried to have her move away she refused because, she said, she was grooming her little boy to be himself a catholico. The day of his election must have been for her a day of triumphant joy!

By the time of Catholico Zakaria (Zechariah) of Tzag (855-876) the power of the osticans had considerably waned in Armenia due to the corruption of the Abbasid dynasty and its consequent decline. But only two years earlier (853) a number of martyrs known as the "New Adomians" had fallen victims to the cruelty of the notoriously beastly Boula ("bull"), and many nakharars had been carried to Baghdad as prisoners. The times required a competent leader of the church and Zakaria, who was a mere deacon, was made catholico in the course of a single day. The exiled nakharars returned in 857. Zakaria received them, including those who, through weakness, had accepted the Moslem religion. Each of the returning nakharars assumed the title of "Prince", which is indicative of the important social and political changes that Armenia was undergoing.

When one of these princes, Ashot, became "Prince of Princes" and was then recognized as "King" both by the Arab emir and the Greek emperor, a new era dawned in the history of Armenia. Ashot was a Bagratide. The BAGRATIDE DYNASTY ruled Armenia from 885 to 1047.

ARMENIA HAS A NEW KING
(THE STORIES OF CATHOLICOS KEVORK AND
KING ASHOT)

In the middle of the eighth century Armenia was a land of princes. Each prince had a small territory which he governed more or less as he pleased. But in order to hold his position a prince had to be very clever. He also had to be a good military leader. The fact was that each prince wanted as large a territory as possible, and none would hesitate to attack a weaker neighbour and take part or all of his land.

The territory which a prince ruled was his "principality". In many ways the principalities of Armenia were alike. There were the peasants who tilled the fields and grew grapes, wheat and other grains, vegetables and fruits. There were the artisans who made things such as furniture, clothes, armors, saddles. There were the masons who built churches and castles under the direction of famous architects. There were the bishops, priests and monks who blessed houses and other objects, prayed over sick and dying people, performed the sacraments, urged their congregations to live good lives and educated the sons of noblemen as well as those who were willing to become monks or priests in their turn. The most important clergyman was of course the chief bishop of the principality. There were other bishops working with him, but he it was who took charge of the religious needs of the prince and represented the principality or diocese when there was a council of the entire Armenian church under the presidency of the catholicos. The bishop had often as much power as the prince and even more. People would rather heed the bishop than obey the orders of the prince; but sometimes what the people wanted did not matter at all. The prince would make them do what *he* wanted. The bishop also acted as

a judge in litigations that had to do with the religious life of the people.

The prince's work was to settle the non-religious disputes that would arise daily among his subjects; but fighting was the occupation which he liked best and which took up most of his time. Periods of peace were very rare, and any prince who did not fight was not, in the eyes of the people, much of a prince. There was little else, at any rate, that a prince could do to keep himself busy: even after settling disputes, fighting, and going to church, he had a good deal of time left on his hands. He would then go hunting or let himself be amused in various other ways. Some princes always sought their own glory; but some of the virtuous princes of Armenia were very much concerned about the welfare of the people of the whole country. One such good prince was Ashot.

Now the catholicos, the bishops, the princes and all the people would have been much happier without the obligation to pay tribute to the Arabs. This, however, they had to do. The Arabs had conquered most of Armenia and had stationed large armies nearby. If the Armenians refused to pay taxes, the punishment was slavery, torture or death. They therefore worked hard to pay the tribute. But the more they paid, the more the Arabs demanded, until the annual taxes rose to the staggering sum of ten million dirhams, one dirham being the equivalent of about twenty-five cents. And as if that were not enough, the Armenians had to maintain a whole army to fight for the Arabs at any time.

No matter how hard they worked, it was impossible for the Armenians to pay all this money and have, besides, enough to eat and decent homes to live in. The country soon became extremely poor. Yet princes could not get together to find a solution to the problem, because above each prince there was only the Arab ostican. There was no Armenian authority around which they could rally. But the bishops were better organized. Above them was the catholicos. *They* could come together, and the unity of the church meant the unity of the country. No man,

therefore, was as responsible for the welfare of *all* the Armenian people as the catholicos.

The catholicos at the time was Kevork* II. One day as he was meditating upon the condition of the Armenian people he remembered a plan that used to occupy the mind of the previous catholicos, Zakaria of Tzag. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "I can do what my predecessor had in mind."

He was actually thinking of Prince Ashot. This prince belonged to an ancient and famous family. Families which last a long time from father to son and occupy important functions in a state or nation are called "dynasties". Ashot belonged to the Bagratide dynasty. In olden times the Bagratides had an important function: it was to place the crown on the head of the king during the ceremony of his coronation. The Armenians had not had a king for a long, long time, and therefore the Bagratides had not had the honor of placing a crown on anyone's head. The old Arsacid dynasty whose members alone used to become kings, had died out. In the absence of a king, the wise prince Ashot had become the most influential of all the princes and the Arab emir had given him the title: "Prince of Princes". This was in the days of Catholicos Zakaria, who had died in 876, before realizing his grand plan which was to have Prince Ashot crowned.

The more Kevork II, the new catholicos, pondered his predecessor's plan and desire, the more he was convinced that it would be a glorious event for Armenia. Therefore he and some other princes came together and went and spoke to the Arab ostican of Armenia whose name was Issa ben Sheikh. "We want our prince Ashot to become a king," they said.

All the ostican could do was to take this petition to the grand emir. The grand emir lived in a town called Samara near the great city of Baghdad. He was then, as almost always, on unfriendly terms with the Greeks. He was also having troubles with the other Arab chieftains of his empire. He needed friends

*Also spelled Georg. This is the same name as George.

and allies. For these reasons, and because he liked Prince Ashot personally, he signed an order to the effect that Ashot, Armenia's "Prince of Princes" could, from then on, have the title of "King" and enjoy the honors due to a king. He himself sent Ashot a crown, royal vestments, and a long sword in a golden sheath, with a handle decorated with precious stones. He also sent him many Arabian horses which, as people said, ran as if borne by the wind.

The ceremony of coronation took place at Shiracavan because the capital, Dowin, was not then a free Armenian city. Nearly all the bishops and all the princes of Armenia had gathered in the large church. The whole town was decorated with flowers; rugs of many colors were hanging from roofs and window sills. White doves were flown as a sign of great rejoicing. Thousands of people in and out of the church were donned in their very best. The ladies of the nobility had spent days to have their new dresses ready for this occasion. They wore long gowns, and high hats with veils covering their pretty faces. Never had the people witnessed such a colorful and magnificent occasion. And when the catholicos blessed the new king, and called him "King Ashot of the Armenians", many wept with joy. It was an unforgettable day. The year was 885. After four centuries and a half Armenia had a king, again.

King Ashot was one of the greatest statesmen of Armenia. He knew how to control the other princes and keep them united. He also knew how to live on friendly terms with the Arabs without losing sight of the interests of his own country. And when the necessity arose of having recourse to arms, no soldier was braver than he.

King Ashot was also a church loving and pious man. He was remembered, for example, for his gifts of lands and vineyards to the famous monastery of the island of Sevan. The head of this monastery, Mashtots Vardapet, was one of the most famous clergymen of the eighth century. He compiled a book also known as *Mashtots* after his own name. This book is used to this day by the bishops and priests of the Armenian church for

the performance of many sacraments and other special services. Two churches, one dedicated to the holy apostles and the other to the Holy Mother of God, were built on that island as gifts of Lady Mariam, wife of the Prince of Sewnik. King Ashot had a great respect for Mashtots Vardapet. It was always with pleasure that he heard of the progress of the monastery where his monks prayed, worked and educated the people.

The joy of King Ashot was doubled when he learned, shortly after his coronation, that the emperor of Constantinople was also sending him a crown and recognizing him as king. There was a period of peace and he and the catholicos worked hand in hand to repair the damage that had been done to Armenia during years of Arab attacks, oppression and wars. Armenia had still to pay a tribute, but it was ten times less.

Ashot lived only five years as King of the Armenians. His son, Simbat, succeeded him. Catholicos Kevork had the exceptional pleasure of blessing Simbat's crown too, which was also sent by the grand emir. He thus performed twice in his lifetime the rare ceremony of the coronation of an Armenian king. But days of misfortune were awaiting him. Some years later the Arab ostican attacked King Simbat and carried the catholicos away as a captive as he was in the process of negotiating a peace settlement. Catholicos Kevork had devoted almost all his life to peace. Wherever there was a quarrel, there was Catholicos Kevork, trying to reconcile the warring sides. He did not remain a captive for very long. The Armenian nobles promptly raised the necessary ransom and he was freed. He was a lover of justice and a peacemaker. When he died in 897 he was no longer a resident of the city of Dowin which had been shaken by an earthquake four years earlier. A cortege of clergymen and princes took his remains to Tzoravank, a monastery near the city of Van.

Introduction to Story XX

Saint Gregory of Narec who died in 1010 at the age of about sixty, is undoubtedly the greatest Armenian poet and one of the greatest poets of the world. Some unkind people tried even in his lifetime to mar his reputation as a saint, but without success. He had in fact the pure and uneventful life of a monk, spent mostly in prayer and meditation. He was well-known as an erudite in his early twenties and King Gourgen of the House of Ardzrounik asked him to write a commentary on the Song of Songs. He has written other commentaries, prayers, homilies, but his opus magnum is the "Book of Prayer" or "Song of Laments" known simply as "Narec". It is a book which has an unusual power: it strikes the deepest chords of the human soul, an effect which it achieves both by its content and its form.

Narec seems to be a harrowing confession of Gregory's own sins; but to interpret the whole book in terms of this confession would be a gross mistake, for even a little perceptiveness will reveal at once that his extremely sensitive heart bleeds on behalf of the whole world. The lament is over a sinful world which has brought itself to a condition of damnation through an active force of evil. Salvation is from God alone who can enlighten people and give them power to break the power of darkness. This salvation comes about through Christ the Lord, but men must acknowledge their sinfulness in an attitude of total and painful sincerity.

The style of Saint Gregory of Narec is so personal and unique that it can be recognized at once. Few people in the history of world literature have, to the extent that he has, been able to bend a given language to their own will and exact from it all that it can give. And surely no one's mastery of the Armenian language has excelled that of this "watchful angel in human form" as he is sometimes referred to. His characteristic technique consists in pouring forth related and synonymous adjectives and nouns which come at the reader as a

seemingly interminable avalanche until he opens himself to the saint's message in a state of mystic awareness.

By the time of Saint Gregory of Narec the Armenian people had drunk the cup of human cruelty to its dregs. The author of the "Song of Laments" is therefore supremely Armenian; but he has penetrated so deeply into the soul of one people that he has come into intimate contact with the soul of the world. The book has not been translated into English as yet. The qualifications required for such a task are as rare as they are difficult; and one must be capable and willing to devote to it a good deal of one's life. The complete work was translated into French by Father Sahac V. Keshishian in 1961. Several translations exist from the grabar to the vernacular Armenian, notably those of the late patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Thorgom Goushakian, and of the late patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Garegin Khatchatourian.

It goes without saying that such a work of religious literature could not be produced in Armenia without some measure of peace and economic relaxation. Armenia entered a period of relative peace and prosperity in the second half of the tenth century under the reigns of Abas I (928-953), Ashot III (953-977), Simbat II (977-990) and Gagik I Shahenshah ("King of Kings") (990-1019). J. Muyldeermans, a historian of the Middle East, calls it "a period of incomparable splendor." But the period immediately preceding was bleak indeed! Under the black and bloody osticanship of an Arab fiend called Youssouf, the Armenian people were plundered in the most gruesome manner under the guise of taxation. A famine began in 915 and lasted seven years. The historian of the times, after giving us assurances of the accuracy of his report, tells us "that the hands of the merciful women cooked their children and they became food to them".

The catholicos then was Hovhanness V of Draskhanacairt (898-929), a historian and an active leader. His main function was to console his people and to reconcile the quarreling and dissident princes. When he and the king were invited to Constantinople by the Greek emperor, he refused to go for fear of being subjected to doctrinal pressures. When Hovhanness V died in 929, Abas I had succeeded his brother on the Bagratide throne. For reasons of security the see of catholicos had been transferred to Al'thamar which is an island in the lake of Van (then known as the lake of Bznounik). Vaspouracan

is the relatively vast region around this lake. It was the territory of the Ardzrounik who sympathized more with the Greeks than with the Arabs. Their policy differed therefore from that of the Bagratides who sided with the Arabs whenever possible. During the reign of Abas the internal troubles of the Arabs forced them to leave the Armenians in relative peace. The catholicos now was Anania I of Mogk (946-968). Several monasteries were promptly built and they became important centers of learning. The monastery of Narec on the southern side of the Lake of Van was among these. For reasons both personal and related to quarrels among the Armenian princes, Anania was obliged to transfer his see from Al'thamar to Varag and then to Ani and perhaps to nearby Argina.

King Abas was succeeded by his son Ashot III, known as "the Merciful". He was crowned at the city of Ani which from then on became an outstanding city in the history of Armenia. With its cathedral and other churches, Ani became one of the wealthiest and most beautiful of medieval cities on the river Akhourian which divides today the Armenian S.S.R. from Turkey.

Ashot's wife also was a charitable person. Together they founded many institutions of charity. Among the monasteries which they built are Sanahin and Hal'bat, both founded in 964, which became celebrated centers of learning.

Ani reached its apogee during the reign of Simbat II, the son of Ashot the Merciful. His reign marked a renaissance in Armenia. All the arts flourished; in particular Trdat must be mentioned as the most talented architect of the times. He built, among other churches, the celebrated cathedral of Ani. The catholicos was then Khatchic I. Emigrations from Armenia started during his pontificate. He is the first Armenian catholicos who consecrated bishops for cities outside Armenia, such as Antioch and Tarsus.

Simbat II was succeeded by Gagik I, a brave, intelligent, generous and charitable ruler. During his reign Catholicos Sargis I of Sevan who had followed Khatchic I, was the capable head of the church. They were the last happy political and religious rulers of Ani. They both died within the same year (1019).

Following the example of his predecessors Gagik had concentrated on the building of institutions of worship, benevolence and learning; this development went hand in hand with the economic prosperity of the land.

CHURCHES AND A BOOK OF PRAYER

(THE STORIES OF ASHOT THE MERCIFUL
AND SAINT GREGORY OF NAREC)

In the tenth and eleventh centuries Ani was the most glorious city of Armenia, and one of the most beautiful cities in the world. People would come there from far and near, some for business and others to admire its many beautiful buildings. The two most prominent buildings of any city at that time were the castle where the prince lived and the cathedral where the bishop celebrated the Divine Liturgy. But Ani was the residence not merely of a prince, but of the king. It was also the residence of the catholicos.

One day in the year 962 or 964 (we do not know exactly which), all the people of Ani put on their best clothes and rushed to the cathedral, but there was not room in it for all. Some had to stand in the stone-paved square in front of it, and others had to wait in the streets. Prince Ashot was, on that day, being crowned a king. Almost the whole city was moved with an enthusiasm it had never known before. Catholicos John of the Caucasian Albanians was there, and he was going to take part in the ceremony. The king of Albania was there too. At least forty Armenian bishops had come from other towns to assist Catholicos Anania of Armenia in the coronation ceremony.

Ashot proved to be one of the most pious kings of the Armenians. At that time there were in Armenia not one but several kings, of whom Ashot III was the most powerful. He was a valiant soldier and knew how to lead an army. He defeated the enemies of his people and drove them out more than once, yet he never enjoyed fighting and shedding blood. He had a loving heart and one did not have to be a nobleman to be liked by him. He liked the poor people; he wanted to bring happiness to

those who had not been very lucky in this world. He wanted to live a life that was pleasing to God. We remember him to this day as Ashot *the Merciful*.

Ashot the Merciful would often send his attendants out in the streets to gather together lame, blind and otherwise afflicted people and invite them to eat with him. Once, during a banquet, as the wine steward was passing the same bowl of wine from one guest to another, he hesitated to give it to the king immediately after another man had drunk from it, for this man was covered with sores. He was seated next to the king.

“It does not matter,” said the king and drank from the same bowl.

Ashot the Merciful wanted his subjects to live in security. He built around the city a thick inner wall. There were of course no airplanes in the Middle Ages and no cannons. A wall all around the city was therefore a good protection against enemies. Towers were built on the walls, at regular distances, for watchmen to look out day and night and to inform the king’s general should they see any foes approaching. Ashot had a chapel built in each tower. There were thus so many churches and chapels in Ani that it was known as the city of “one thousand and one churches.”

The king and the queen of the Armenians could, if they so chose, use most of the money in the royal treasury for their own pleasure. Instead, Ashot and his queen spent it on the people; with the advice and consent of the catholicos they built homes for the handicapped; they built monasteries for those who wanted to become monks or priests, or to receive an education.

In the second half of the tenth century and for some time thereafter the Arab chiefs were fighting among themselves; and the Byzantine or Greek emperor was friendly to the Armenians. Armenia was more or less at peace. People spent their money not on war but on education; and the same good use was made of time: young people did not spend their time in fighting but in learning. As the number of educated people increased, more and more discussions were held, religion being the favorite sub-

ject. Many outstanding scholars came out of the monasteries of Armenia. Churches were built in greater number—and thus there was a great need for architects and engineers. The greatest Armenian architect of that period was Trdat of Ani. His fame had spread over the entire Byzantine empire. He was invited to Constantinople to rebuild the dome of the cathedral of Saint Sophia which had been damaged by an earthquake. That cathedral stands in Constantinople to this day. It is a masterpiece.

A revival of literature and of the arts took place in all of Armenia; not only in the kingdom of the Bagratides, but also in the kingdom of the Ardzrounik. This Armenian kingdom was not always very friendly to the Bagratides, but the catholicos tried, and sometimes succeeded, in keeping them in harmony.

Now the area where the Ardzrounik had their dominion was Vaspouracan, with the city of Van as its capital. This city is situated on the shores of a lake which is large enough to be called a sea and is known to the Armenians as Vana Dzov. On the southern side of Vana Dzov, in the province of Rishtounik, there was a little village. Very few people would have known the name of that village today, were it not for the man who was born there in the year 950. He grew up to be a scholar and a religious poet. In the history of Armenian literature none is greater than he. He is Gregory of Narec.

Gregory was the youngest of three brothers. Their mother had died soon after Gregory was born, and their father became a priest. The father's name was Khosrov. His abilities as a clergyman were soon appreciated and he was made the bishop of the province of Antzevatzik. He wrote an explanation of the meaning of the Divine Liturgy. This was copied down by Sahac, Gregory's eldest brother. Another brother, Hovhanness, was the abbot of the monastery of Narec where Gregory was a student and then a monk.

Gregory entered the monastery as a young boy. Even though he had to follow a strict discipline, he liked his studies. He would sleep little, eat frugal meals, go to church for all the seven daily services, and find enough time to read carefully the

writings of the fathers of the church. The bishops, priests and monks, the king and the princes of Vaspouracan had already heard of his learning and piety when he was still a very young man.

One day the king's special messenger came to the monastery to deliver a message. All the brothers were jealous when they learned that the king had written personally to the young monk Gregory. The abbot gave him the letter. The king was asking him to write a commentary on the Song of Songs. The religious meaning of this book of the Bible was difficult to understand. The king wanted an intelligent and learned person to make it clear to him as well as to those who would be reading it then or in the future. This work could make Gregory very famous, but he did not seem to be very pleased.

"Reverend Father," he said, "I think I am too young for a work of this caliber. An older and wiser person should be writing the commentary that His Majesty is asking for . . ."

Twice he refused, but the king insisted and the abbot encouraged him. In the end he wrote the book.

Saint Gregory of Narec spent most of his time reading, writing and studying. He studied not only theology and religion, but also other subjects such as the manufacture and sail of boats.

Whenever he had time Saint Gregory would go to Vana Dzov to gaze at the horizon where the earth and the sky seemed to touch, and to listen to the waves lapping gently against the shores. Sometimes he would stand there alone, thinking. The sea would scintillate, reflecting the rays of the setting sun, as if handfuls of diamonds were being strewn by the Maker of heaven and earth on the surface of the blue waters. Saint Gregory would think then of the passage of time. He would think of the history of his people. He would think of all people everywhere. He would meditate on God, the Maker and Keeper of the universe. Confronted with all the majesty and power and goodness of God, feelings of unworthiness would stir his soul. Yet he would remember that God is mindful of him and of all the sinful people of the world. Then he would forget all wordly things and

find himself engaged in a conversation with God from the depths of his heart.

Many years went by. Saint Gregory was now fifty. He had spent most of these fifty years in meditation, prayer and learning. One night he was still sitting in front of his wooden desk when all the other brothers had gone to sleep. A flickering candle threw his huge shadow on the bare wall behind him. A cross was on the desk and a parchment. Saint Gregory had been holding his head in both his hands for a long time. Feelings in his heart and ideas in his head were crowding each other out. Yet suddenly he was calm. He took the pen, dipped it in the ink-bottle and wrote: "Conversations with God from the Depths of the Heart—Discourse A". That was the beginning and the first chapter of an immortal book. It contains ninety-five "Discourses" or chapters. It is a great work of religious literature, one of the few masterpieces of the world. It came to be known by the name of the village where it was written: *Narec*.

Saint Gregory had achieved the purpose of his life. He had given to the world a dazzling Book of Prayer. Generations to come could read it and pray in turn and find peace in the love of God.

He died soon after the completion of that work.

Introduction to Story XXI

We saw in the introduction to our last story that Gagik I died in 1019. The vacant throne belonged by right to the late king's eldest son, Hovhanness Simbat, but he was dull-witted, heavy and slow, and his brother Ashot claimed the throne for himself. Hostilities ensued. It was agreed in the end that Hovhanness should keep the city of Ani with its surrounding territory, and Ashot should assume the government of territories lying farther towards the northeast. It was further agreed that upon the death of either one, the other would be the king of the entire Bagratide domains.

While Hovhanness and Ashot were dividing the kingdom between themselves, a race of savage warriors, known as the Turanians, was making its appearance at the eastern frontiers of Armenia. The Turanians were divided roughly into three multitudes of invading hordes: the *Turks* moved westward; the *Mongolians* advanced eastward as far as the interior of China; the *Tartars* went north, causing the Russians to group themselves around Moscow instead of Kiev where they had been before the Tartar attacks. In the course of history the Armenians had to deal with all of these Turanians.

We know that individual Armenians had been migrating westward all along; now the appearance of the enemy brought about a new phenomenon: individual princes would willingly give their lands to the Byzantine emperor, receiving in exchange a patch of land in the interior of the empire. Such annexations pleased the Greek emperor because they enlarged his holdings. As to the Armenian prince, though he gave up his independence and acknowledged the Byzantine suzerainty, he gained security instead, by moving away from the dangerous frontiers. He agreed to, and even welcomed, the arrangement because he could never himself raise enough of an army to keep the enemy away. Some princes believed, furthermore, that there was a certain inevitability about the tribulations at hand. Several sects were announcing at the rooftops that soon after the year 1000

the world would come to an end. Thus Sennecherim gave his kingdom of Vaspouracan to the emperor (Basil II) and received a principality around Sivas where he migrated with forty thousand followers. This emigration en masse weakened Armenia considerably and may have contributed to the loosening of the tenacity of other princes.

The above-mentioned Hovhanness Simbat and Ashot died within the same year (1043). Before his death Hovhanness had had the un-wisdom, with the encouragement of the catholicos (Petros I Getadartz: 1019-1058), of appointing the emperor of Byzantium as heir to his kingdom. Now his nephew, Gagik II, a valiant young man of eighteen, repulsed the repeated attacks of the Seljuk Turks who had once been driven out by the Armenian forces under the command of Vahram Pahlavouni. The young king's patriotism and self-confidence caused him to reject the arrangement of exchange made by his predecessor. Thereupon the emperor invited him to Constantinople ostensibly as an ally. Gagik was persuaded to go there at the insistence of a former rival and pretender to the throne, Vest Sargs. Shortly after his arrival in Constantinople he discovered to his bitter dismay that the keys to Ani had already been sent to the emperor by the same Vest Sargs and by the catholicos who had had the custody of them. Over the determined refusal of Gagik to part with his kingdom, Greek forces, stooping to unite with the Arabs, occupied Ani and made of the Bagratide kingdom a province of the Byzantine empire. The year was 1045. The capture of Ani by the Greeks was the result of the emperor's insensate greed and of his indifference to the destiny of his own empire. The Armenians of the area did not, of course, continue to fight for its defense with their customary zeal, for the land no longer belonged to them. The Greeks were unable to hold back the Seljuk hordes who within a very short time were at the very doors of Constantinople, and it was then that the frantic appeals of the emperor unleashed the Crusades. Constantine Monomachus must have thought he was being smart when he called Gagik to Constantinople. In fact he was taking another step in the radical departure of Byzantium from the old Roman policy of keeping Armenia as a more or less independent kingdom to defend *itself* against any Asiatic threat. His maneuver goes down in history as a major instance of political ineptitude.

The city of Ani, now under Greek control, soon became a place of moral decadence and was lost within twenty years to the Seljuk Turks who invaded it under Alpaslan, the son (or nephew) of Doughril,

the first Seljuk conqueror. Then in 1080 the dynasty of the Bagratides came to an end with the death of Hovhanness, Gagik's son.

The history of the Armenians during this period is a black page of sufferings and massacres with, here and there, shining spots of heroism. The church was the only source of hope and comfort; but even the Armenian church the Greeks would not let be. The successor of Petros I, Catholicos Khatchic II of Ani, was made to suffer at the hands of the Greeks whose aim was the final suppression of the Armenian catholicate. An instance of the hatred which the Greeks nursed against the Armenian church is the vile joke of the Greek bishop of Caesarea who called his dog *Armen* with the deliberate intention of insulting the Armenians. The deposed king Gagik who, after the loss of his kingdom, had become a champion of Armenian church doctrine against his captors, had that bishop (Marcus by name) and his dog put into the same sack at the bishop's own house. He then ordered his men to beat the dog who in his rage bit his own master to death. At the instigation of the Greeks Gagik was assassinated in the year 1079.

Catholicos Khatchic II died in the early sixties of the eleventh century. The see of catholicos remained vacant for a time because the Greeks opposed a new election. But in 1066, through the efforts of Prince Gagik (Ashotian) of Carss, Grigor II Vicayasser ("the Martyr-lover") became catholicos at Dsamendav, a village in the domains of that prince. The surname of Grigor II is due to the fact that he was an ascetic by temperament and would rather study the lives of the ascetics and martyrs than attend to the complicated affairs of the catholicate. He was also in the habit of appointing vicars whenever he was called upon to perform his regular duties. As a result, by 1085 at least five other bishops had the title of "Catholicos": at Ani, Honi, Marash, Tarsus and Cairo. Grigor Vicayasser was a man of saintly dispositions and a true scholar. As such he is an eminent clergyman of the Armenian church. While he was travelling around the world, writing, and translating from the Greek and the Syrian, the affairs of the catholicate were in the able hands of Bishop Barsel' (Basil) of Ani, who became his successor as catholicos. The career of Barsel' I is connected with the establishment of the new Armenian kingdom in Cilicia, which we shall relate in the introduction to our next story.

THE SEE OF CATHOLICOS GOES
TO CILICIA

(THE STORY OF GRIGOR III PAHLAVOUNI)

The year 1045 was a tragic year for the Armenians. In that year the Greek emperor deceived them shamefully. He invited the Armenian king Gagik II to his palace and kept him there while his forces, allied with the Arabs, were entering the beautiful city of Ani.

There were many fortresses in Armenia besides those of Ani. In the eleventh century the princes of many of these fortresses had to fight not the Greeks, but an even greater enemy: the Seljuk Turks. These terrible vandals came from Asia and spread terror and ruin wherever they passed. They did not want to *conquer* new lands. Or at least so it seemed at first. They came like a storm. They killed, looted, destroyed, burned what they could, carried off women and slaves, and disappeared. But then gradually they organized themselves and occupied politically the places they took. They were good fighters. Their first great chief has left his name in history as a great warrior. His name was Toghrul.

Toghrul came to the field of Bassenn and threatened the Armenian town of Manazcairt. The people of the town knew that Toghrul and his dragoons would be coming by the thousands. It was harvest time. They had gathered all the provisions they could find for themselves and their animals, and had withdrawn within the fortress.

There were two ways of capturing a fortress: the easier way was to lay a siege around it and wait. The people inside would sooner or later run out of food and surrender. But Toghrul knew that such a strategy would not work in this case. The people inside the fortress of Manazcairt had plenty to eat and they

could withstand the siege a long time: longer than Toghrul was willing to wait. The warrior decided to take the place by force. He ordered his missile man to ready the catapult, and with this formidable engine the first stone was hurled against the fortress. As the pelting continued, other Seljuk soldiers ran to it and prepared to scale the walls.

The Armenians had been praying and asking God's help. The aged priest who was conducting the services (the historian does not mention his name), now decided to bring his active share to the defense. He set up his trebucket and displayed an astonishing skill in hitting the enemy rocks in the air, before they even reached the fortress. Other fighters under the command of Prince Basil lowered huge prongs, hooked the Seljuk soldiers who were trying to climb the walls, let them dangle for a while to discourage the enemy and then drew them up. When Toghrul began to use a larger catapult, a Frank knight who was helping the Armenians came out of a secret door, made a dash to the engine and set fire to it. Toghrul's men perished by the hundreds. The chief was weary and no longer so confident. He was almost discouraged when a pig, hurled from the castle, landed in front of him. Toghrul had a horror of pigs. The joke made him furious. He ordered his ablest general to storm the castle at any cost. But then he gave up because the next missile he received was the head of that very general.

Toghrul gathered his men and went away. He went away to attack other castles, to starve other people. He and his successor, Alpaslan, made Armenia go through some of its blackest days. The Seljuks could not be finally defeated. There seemed to be no end to their numbers. But even in the midst of all this tragedy the Armenians did not forget their love of learning and their love for their church. Catholicos Grigor (Gregory) II Vicayasser wrote, at about this time, the service of the Washing of the Feet. This is the service that is performed in all the Armenian churches in the afternoon of Maundy Thursday in commemoration of Jesus' washing the feet of His disciples after the Last Supper. The most active Armenian bishop during the pontificate

of Catholicos Grigor was Bishop Barsel' (Basil). This bishop himself became the catholicos of the Armenians in 1105. His official see was at Ani, even though that city no longer belonged to the Armenians. By this time many princes had migrated to Cilicia, a land in the southeastern region of Asia Minor. In the area where they established themselves they were to found a kingdom which was to be known as *New Armenia*.

The father of Grigor II Vicayasser was Grigor Pahlavouni. The Pahlavounis are not a royal dynasty, but the services that the several members of that family rendered to the Armenian people are as important as the services of any king or prince. Grigor Pahlavouni was interested in every field of human knowledge and had acquired a vast learning. He wrote books of his own, translated many from the Greek, kept a correspondence with almost every person of note, fought a heretical sect (the "Thontracians"), administered a large territory, and raised a family of eight children. He gave all of them an excellent education. The emperor of Constantinople gave him the honorary degree of Master. Although there were many Masters of the Arts in Armenia, Gregory deserved his so well that he is known to this day as Grigor Magistros.

Catholicos Barsel' I of Ani whom we met above was the nephew of Grigor II Vicayasser. He (Barsel') was succeeded on the throne of catholicos by Apirat, the son of his cousin. The new catholicos (Apirat) was therefore Barsel's cousin once removed. His name was Grigor III Pahlavouni. He was no more than twenty years old when he became the head of the Armenian church. He was very gifted and had attracted the attention of prominent people even as a boy.

In 1113 there were in Armenia four important bishops' sees: the see of *Betchni*, which was the ancient see of Ani, the see of *Hal'bat*, which was an important center of learning in the Caucasus, the see of *Tathev*, which was the church headquarters of the important principality of the Sewnik, and the see of the province of *Artaz* where the apostle Thaddeus had been buried. These sees, among others, had to give their consent to Grigor's

election. Although Grigor lived *outside* of Armenian territory and was in fact, on his way to the principality of New Armenia (Cilicia), the Armenian people still wished to have him as their only catholicos. In his long pontificate of fifty-three years Grigor III himself was keenly concerned with the spiritual life of all the Armenians everywhere.

Grigor III lived during one of the most important periods of the history of the world and of the history of the Armenians themselves. He was one or two years old when Pope Urban II delivered in southern France one of the most famous sermons ever preached anywhere. Jerusalem was then in the hands of "infidels", that is of Seljuk Turks. The pope called upon all the Christian princes and the people of France and of Europe to go and free the Holy Sepulchre. Thousands upon thousands of people responded to the call immediately. They had large red crosses sewn on the chests of their tunics, armed themselves as best they could, and started out for Jerusalem. The Crusades, as this movement is called, lasted nearly two hundred years. As it turned out, the "infidels" had more territory at the end of the Crusades than at the beginning. The Crusades did nevertheless have some successes and in some of these the Armenians had their share. In Cilicia they showed them the way, gave them food and fought with them. New Armenia was for the Crusaders a sort of home away from home. Unfortunately they sometimes acted as if it were their own home. This was too much. The Armenians wanted them as guests, but not as masters.

The Latin Crusades appeared in New Armenia in 1098. At that time the Armenian prince, Rouben, had established a principality in the mountains of Cilicia and had made the fortress of Bartzirberd, near the city of Siss, his headquarters. His successors, the princes of the ROUBENIAN dynasty, enlarged and strengthened the principality, until the Greeks became concerned and began to fight against them. Catholicos Grigor III sought the friendship of the Latins. They in turn wanted to make friends with the Armenians because they needed their assistance. In 1141 there was a meeting of the Latin church in Antioch.

The Armenian catholicos was invited there along with his brother, Bishop Nersess. It is at this meeting that the Armenian and Latin churches established official contact. The pope then was Innocent II and he was represented at the meeting by Cardinal Alberic. The Latin cardinal and the Armenian catholicos maintained friendly relations; they even made, together, a journey to Jerusalem. The Crusaders had managed to take that city in 1099. They lost it in 1187. They won it back and held it for another fifteen years from 1229 to 1244. Never again did the city where the Christian church was born become a city in a Christian state.

For some time until the year 1149 the see of the Armenian catholicos had been moving from place to place due to political uncertainties. In that year it found a permanent abode for long years to come. Near the city now called Gaziantep (in Turkey) there was the castle of Rhomcla ("Greek castle"). It was owned by a Frank knight, Joscelin. His wife was the granddaughter of Prince Rouben, the founder of New Armenia. When her husband died, she gave the castle to the Armenian catholicos and she herself moved to Europe.

It was at this castle that Grigor III lived and worked for the rest of his life, making of it a place suitable for the head of the Armenian church. He died in 1167. We remember him as one of the great servants of the church.

Introduction to Story XXII

We spoke in our preceding story of the establishment, in Cilicia, of a new Armenian principality under the leadership of Prince Rouben, a scion of the Bagratide family. For the Armenian church this development created two major problems:

The first problem had to do with the locality of the see of catholicos. The decision of Grigor III Pahlavouni to reside near the political center of his people (now outside of historic Armenia) was not made without creating some dissensions. A compromise was reached when the influential episcopal sees which had remained in Ancient Armenia, and were still active, were given a sizable prerogative in the choice of the catholicos. This was necessary if the unity of the church was to be maintained. It is clear, furthermore, that the only reason why the see made this move was to be in close contact with the Armenian princes who largely decided the political destiny of the people. Soon after the political authority vanished, the see went back to the place of its origin.

We shall have occasion to note, however, that a certain tension remained between the "eastern" clergymen who remained in Armenia proper and the "western" clergymen who were exposed more directly to Western influences. The "western" clergymen were also under the pressure of the Armenian princes who were themselves westernized or rather "frankified" and whose political needs coincided with a broader attitude toward Western preferences.

The second problem was the relationship of the Armenian church with the Greek and Latin churches. The Greeks had been trying for a long time, and continued to try, to have the Armenians join them doctrinally. The Latins now tried to have them accept the head of the Latin church as the head of the church universal. This meant of course the adoption of the Latin rites and of the Council of Chalcedon. And it must be remembered that the religious interests of the Greeks and

Latins ran parallel to their political interests. The Latin pope and the Greek patriarch had already excommunicated each other; and in 1204 the Crusaders attacked, ransacked and occupied not Jerusalem, but Constantinople, the center of the Greek empire and of Greek Christianity. Neither party could therefore disdain the support of the Armenians.

Up to the time of, and during, the pontificate of Nersess IV of *Cla* ("the Graceful"), the political developments in New Armenia were as follows:

Prince Rouben had died in 1095. He had created a new state in Asia Minor which was further consolidated and enlarged by his son and successor, Prince Constantine. It was during his tenure that the Crusades came to Cilicia. One of their leaders, the famous Baldwin of Flanders, established the Latin kingdom of Edessa, after first killing its Armenian consul. Then, in an effort to maintain favourable and friendly relations with the Armenians, who had become his western neighbours, he married Constantine's niece. This was only the first of a number of such intermarriages. In return for his services to the Crusaders, Constantine was made a baron. He died in 1100 and left two sons: Thoros and Leo. Thoros spent a considerable part of his tenure fighting the Greeks, either for himself or to help the Latin princes of Edessa and Antioch. Occasionally he conducted assaults against other Armenian princes of the district of Lambron, a district which, as we shall see, is important in the history of the church. Other attacks of Thoros were directed against the Turks. With the help of another Armenian prince, Gol' Basil (Kogh Vassil), he captured a Turkish chieftain who would go about calling himself "Sultan of Armenia". Thoros also punished the three Greeks who had murdered Gagik II (see the introduction to Story XXI).

Thoros was succeeded by his brother Leo who had married the sister of Baldwin de Burg, the Latin count or marquis of Edessa. It is this Baldwin, captor and torturer of many Armenian princes, whom the historian has in mind when he says "they (the Latins) sat and thought up evil things and loved the ways of evil". Leo added to the fortresses of Anazarba and Siss, taken by his brother, those of Mamistra, Adana and Tarsus and reached as far as the Mediterranean Sea. The city of Marash was taken from the Turks in 1135 by Leo's nephew, Stephen. Alarmed, the emperor of Constantinople came personally to attack the expanding Armenian barony. Leo died in

captivity in 1145. New Armenia was then trodden under foot by the Greeks and the Seljuks.

Of the four sons of Leo two found protection by attaching themselves temporarily to the person of the sultan of Aleppo, the famous Nureddin. One was killed by the Greeks. The second son, Thoros II, fled incognito to Constantinople. He returned disguised as a merchant and reconquered almost all of New Armenia. He signed a treaty of peace with the Turks in 1153, another with the Greeks in 1159, and then defeated them in his last great battle in 1163. Two years later the Armenian prince Oshin of Lambron, a friend of the Greeks, recognized the supremacy of Thoros. This came about through the good offices of Nersess who was, at the time, still a bishop. Thoros II died in 1168. His son died young, and Mleh, his brother, had himself acknowledged as ruler of New Armenia. He was a friend of the sultan of Aleppo and the residence of Catholicos Nersess was in an area under the control of the same sultan.

It was in the relative isolation of this residence (the castle of Roumkaleh or Rhomcla) that Nersess IV wrote his *General* (or *Pastoral*) *Epistle* on the occasion of his accession to the throne of catholicos at the age of sixty-six. This epistle has come down to us intact. It is an invaluable document. We see through it not only the profound wisdom of the author, but also the mores and behavioral excesses of the times that the new catholicos was trying to correct. Its limpid style and universal appeal make of it one of the main works of the Silver Age of Armenian culture, as the renaissance of New Armenia is sometimes called.

The General Encyclical is addressed to the abbots and monks, the bishops, priests, princes, soldiers, burghers, laborers in the fields and "all the people". One general theme dominates the whole message: Do well your appointed task and let love be the guiding principle of your life.

Saint Nersess exhibits his vast knowledge and exceptional theological insights in his correspondence with the emperor of Constantinople. He defends the Armenian position in doctrinal and ritual matters with humility, without being servile, with dignity without being haughty. And he joins to his other gifts the exquisite soul of a poet, the glowing warmth of a heart animated with Christian love. Blessed were those who sat at his feet, beheld the countenance of his face, and learned from him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN AN ARMENIAN CHURCH FATHER

(THE STORY OF SAINT NERSESS THE GRACEFUL)

The Armenians founded New Armenia somewhat as the English founded New England. The persecuted Armenians, however, did not have to travel by boat; and when they came to the southeastern parts of Asia Minor in great numbers they found there many of their compatriots who had come there individually before. The English had to fight the primitive Indians. The Armenians had to fight the civilized Greeks and Arabs. The English were helped by England, their fatherland; the emigrating Armenians who came to Cilicia in Asia Minor, could receive no help from anyone. Even then Prince Rouben captured three or four fortresses and these became, for a time, the center of a new expanding dominion.

Some of the princes who ruled New Armenia were of course more competent than others. After Rouben the next great soldier and statesman who became the marquis of New Armenia was Thoros II. In his time, that is between 1145 and 1168, there was another Armenian prince called Oshin. His castle was in the district of Lambron. Thoros and Oshin were neighbours and even in-laws but they were not good friends. It was a question of who would have the upper hand in the affairs of New Armenia. Finally they decided to have the head of the church arbitrate between them. Catholicos Grigor III sent his brother, Bishop Nersess. Both the catholicos and his brother were very much respected because of their high positions and because they belonged to the famous Pahlavouni family. Furthermore, Prince Oshin felt particularly close to them because they were the uncles of his wife.

Bishop Nersess carried peace with him wherever he went. He had no difficulty in reconciling the two great families of

Thoros and Oshin. Then the latter invited him to his castle to rest as long as he wished. But the bishop liked neither indolence nor luxury. He wanted to return to his work at his own castle of Rhomcla.

“I’ll come with you, and see to it that you have a comfortable journey,” said Prince Oshin.

“If you wish,” said Bishop Nersess and they set out with many men accompanying them, for the roads were hazardous.

They came to the town of Mamistra. There, at the top of the hill stood the magnificent castle of the duke, His Highness Protostratus Alex. He was the son-in-law of Manuel Comnenus, Emperor of the Greeks, and the commander of a division of the Greek cavalry. Duke Alex was known to be very much interested in the Armenian church. Bishop Nersess decided to pay him a visit in order to enlighten him on the true nature of the religious rites and beliefs of his people. At the time the Greeks wanted the Armenians to believe what *they* believed, and some malevolent people went about carrying from castle to castle wierd rumors about the Armenian church.

“If Jesus Christ is One and if the church is His church, how can we explain the fact that there are many churches, and that these churches are fighting and discrediting each other?” asked the duke at one point in their conversation. He appeared to be very glad to see Bishop Nersess who was one of the best known theologians of that period.

Bishop Nersess was unusually wise, learned and sensitive. The mere thought of the suffering of others made *him* suffer also. How he wished there were no suffering in the world! How he wished people *loved* each other! He had a rather pale face because he slept and ate little and worked hard. But it was his eyes which endeared him to all who came into contact with him. They shone with intelligence and had the tenderness of compassion:

“My dear Duke Alex,” he said, “the churches cannot get together and become One for many reasons, but chiefly because each party to the dispute sees itself all white and the opposite

party all black. People very often are after what suits *them*; they are not after truth. They like to hear themselves talk. They seldom listen to God."

Each time Bishop Nersess answered one question the duke had another to ask. The bishop answered them with patience, calm, and convincing authority. The conversations lasted for several days. The duke was an honest man. He was entirely satisfied with the explanations given by Bishop Nersess. He asked him to write down the main ideas that he had expressed.

"I'll send them on to the emperor, and perhaps on the basis of our conversations the Greek and Armenian churches can find a solution to their differences," he said.

Bishop Nersess thus wrote in the city of Mamistra, at the castle of Duke Alex, an *Essay on the Confession of Faith of the Armenian Church*. As the title shows, he explained in this writing the faith of the Armenian church. He also gave the reasons why the Armenians do certain things as they do, such as the celebration of Theophany ("Christmas") on the sixth of January, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy with wine only (without water) and *unleavened* bread, and so forth.

Bishop Nersess became Catholicos of all Armenians in 1166. The previous catholicos, his brother whom he nevertheless called his "spiritual father", was now old and wished to retire. When Catholicos Nersess occupied the throne, he did not feel that he was taking on new responsibilities because he had been helping Grigor III all along. He had been accomplishing diverse missions and doing all the writings regarding the doctrines and practices of the Armenian church. On the occasion of his elevation to the see of catholicos he wrote a long *General Epistle* to all the people, whether clergy or lay, whether governing or governed. In this letter or epistle Catholicos Nersess advises each man and each woman as to the Christian way of life according to his or her position.

In due time the above-mentioned *Essay* of Catholicos Nersess reached the emperor. Duke Alex himself had taken it to him and the emperor "marvelled at it, and was struck with admira-

tion at the power of wisdom that was contained in what was said," as the historian tells us. He called the Greek patriarch, Lucas, to his palace; they held a conference and they decided to invite the author of the *Essay* to Constantinople for further discussions. They sent an Armenian messenger to Rhomcla to inform the Armenian catholicos of their decision. Their purpose was to have the Armenian church join their larger and more powerful Greek church. As far as they were concerned it was all very simple: the catholicos would go there, say yes to all their proposals and the union of the churches would be accomplished. But Catholicos Nersess saw at once all the complications of the problem. He wanted a meeting of several Armenian bishops with several Greek bishops where discussions would take place on a basis of absolute equality. He wrote back to the emperor:

"You cannot *compel* us to turn your way. The Armenian church has grown her own way for some seven centuries. She has grown solid and she is like a tree. If you force it to change its position it will only break . . . We are not prepared to talk with you about these matters as servants to their master . . . but we are prepared to consider the writings of the apostles and prophets and of the orthodox fathers of the church and come to a decision accordingly . . ."

Catholicos Nersess went a step further. He invited the emperor to come to New Armenia for further discussions. The emperor could not come because he was in the middle of military operations. He sent two theologians. Catholicos Nersess issued a circular to all the bishops of the Armenian church calling a meeting where the proposals of these two theologians would be considered. Many difficulties were in the way of such a meeting. The Greeks always talked from a position of power. Catholicos Nersess felt that in Christianity physical power should not count. He felt that love and concern for truth should be the only guides. The meeting never took place.

Catholicos Nersess was also a great poet. One could see the

grace of the Holy Spirit working in him. It is for that reason that we call him Saint Nersess the Graceful.

One night, as he was working in the isolation of his simple room, he heard, in the total silence of the night, the footsteps of the watchmen walking about on the roof of the castle. He felt grateful to them because they were there, in the cold, guarding his residence against any intruders. He left his work and wrote a beautiful prayer that they could say in turns, verse by verse: "Let us remember, in the night, Your Name, O Lord . . ." That prayer is now part of the regular night service of the Armenian church.

Saint Nersess wrote many other prayers, many songs and many hymns. He is the first Armenian poet who wrote in riming verses. One such poem is "New-created . . ." It is not accidentally that the first letter of this poem is an *N*. The other stanzas begin with *E*, *R*, *S*, *E*, and *S*. Together they read *Nerses* (s). Other poets of the Middle Ages also used to write stanzas beginning with the letters of their names.

Not everything that Saint Nersess wrote was for church services. He also wrote proverbs and little fables. He wanted people to use these, rather than coarse and less beautiful stories, to amuse themselves. But his two most popular writings are *Aravod Louesso* (The Morning of Light . . .) and *Havadov Khosdovanim* (We believe and confess). These have been learned by heart by generations of Armenians ever since.

He died in 1173.

Introduction to Story XXIII

A period of twenty-six years elapsed between the death of Saint Nersess the Graceful and that of Nersess, Archbishop of Lambron and of Tarsus, one of the most outstanding theologians of the Armenian church who died in 1198. During these twenty-six years the political developments in New Armenia were as follows:

Mleh, the brother of Thoros II, had made himself the baron of New Armenia, following the early death of Thoros's son, Rouben II. He was followed by Rouben III, the son of Stephen, another brother of Thoros II. We have already spoken of Stephen as the captor of the city of Marash. He was later tortured and murdered by the Greeks.

Now Bohemund III, a famous Crusader and the chief of the kingdom of Antioch, invited Rouben III to his castle with the intention of occupying Cilicia after depriving that land of its lawful head. Rouben accepted the invitation and Bohemund proceeded to carry out his perfidious plan, but he met with an unexpected and formidable resistance: Leo, the brother of Rouben, defeated Bohemund and compelled him to let Rouben go free. The latter proved to be a wise, if not a very kind, administrator. He ended his days in a monastery as a monk, turning over to his brother Leo the government of the land.

Leo II assumed power in 1187, the year in which the Crusaders lost Jerusalem to the Moslems. This defeat was due to the fact that the Moslems were now united against the would-be deliverers of the Holy Sepulchre, while the latter were woefully divided among themselves. Against all odds Leo II repulsed attacks by the sultans of Aleppo and Damascus in the very year of his assumption of authority. He increased the military strength of the land and established commercial ties with the Venetians and the Genoese. His reign is marked by a close collaboration with the European powers (whether lay or ecclesiastical), as a result of which Frank influence was felt in Armenia more than ever. Instead of Tarsus, he made the city of Siss the capital of New Armenia.

Leo II is undoubtedly the most brilliant statesman of New Armenia. Some of his decisions were dictated by expediency; he could permit himself to take these decisions in the distant hope of reconquering Ancient Armenia from the Seljuk Turks, to unite it with New Armenia and thus establish a vast new kingdom. For this purpose he needed, at one time or another, the support both of the pope and of the German emperor: this political calculation, reinforced by a medieval sense of the propriety of things, prevented him from crowning himself; he maneuvered the reception of a crown from the German emperor, whereupon the emperor of Constantinople himself sent him a crown advising him to dissociate himself from the Western powers "because you are closer to us".

It is in connection with Leo's ambition to be recognized as king by the Western powers that the problem of the relationship of the Armenian and Latin churches became acute. Due to the geographical position and the military respectability of New Armenia the friendship of the Armenians was eagerly sought by the pope during the Crusades. Pope Clement III declared the Armenians to be "firmly established in the catholic faith", "catholic" in this context meaning "true". Nor did this declaration refer to any new development within the Armenian church. Her faith was the faith she had had since the Council of Ephesus.

Leo II seized the occasion to send a delegation to Rome in order to put the friendship of the Latin and Armenian churches on a firmer basis. The delegation started out from Rhomcla, headed by Nersess of Lambron. But its members were robbed on the way and it had to return home. In 1190 Nersess took part in another delegation to meet Frederick Barbarossa who had promised a crown for New Armenia to any person designated by Catholicos Grigor IV. That delegation also failed because the old Holy Roman emperor drowned in a river before reaching Tarsus.

Nersess of Lambron was a close adviser to Leo II. At no time did he wish to bend to the Latin demands in a servile manner, but he was willing to conduct conferences to find a ground of mutual understanding. His activities in New Armenia were such as to lead, he self-confidently and optimistically thought, to a recognition by the Greek and Latin churches of the Armenian church as equal in dignity to their own; and he expected such developments as a background and con-

dition to social, economic and political progress. But more conservative elements, notably at Ani and at the monastery of Sanahin in Ancient Armenia, opposed him. Their reaction caused Nersess of Lambron to lose twice his opportunity to become a catholicos, and as the opposition of the "eastern" clergy mounted, Leo himself was manifestly cold toward him. Nersess complained of the opposition in a bitter letter to Leo. The archbishop and the baron became reconciled once more when the latter convened a council at Tarsus to examine the conditions that the pope was proposing in return for placing the crown on Leo's head by a cardinal. The Latin demands were found to be unacceptable. But Pope Innocent III was now preparing another Crusade and the help of the Armenians in the Middle East was imperative. The Latin demands became less and less harsh. Twelve Armenian bishops signed a mild agreement wherein the Latins agreed not to touch fundamental matters of belief or practice. Leo was crowned shortly thereafter.

Consistently throughout his short but full career Nersess looked forward beyond the confines of a narrow-minded satisfaction, to the realization of universally significant aims. In this he followed a line of conduct initiated by Saint Nersess the Graceful and continued by Grigor IV. We must not go on the assumption, Grigor IV once wrote, that "a different Christ came for the Armenians, and another for the Greeks and another for the Franks". And Nersess of Lambron recognizes as one of his missions the duty to "mix" enemy factions: that is, to reconcile them and enable them to live together in the love of the one Lord. The Council of Rhomcla held in 1179 was the climax of negotiations conducted with the Greeks in this spirit and with this aim in view. Grigor IV who presided at that meeting conducted himself with remarkable fairness and breadth of vision. And his fairness paid, for they all came to an agreement in the end and the letters that they wrote to the Greeks are remarkable documents of scholarship and ecclesiastical diplomacy. It is to be noted that the Greeks were not trying in these proceedings to *turn* the Armenians to the true faith. They were seeking communion as a sign that the Armenians *are* in the true faith. This declaration was made by the Greek Synod: "we were misled up to now by erroneous information".

Nersess of Lambron died during the pontificate of Grigor VI Apirat (a Pahlavouni) who had succeeded Grigor V Karavezh.

Grigor VI reigned from 1194 to 1203.

A CHAMPION OF THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

(THE STORY OF ARCHBISHOP NERSESS OF LAMBRON)

On a Sunday of the year 1168 an ordination was to be performed in the cathedral of Rhomcla. This was two years after Saint Nersess the Graceful had become Catholicos of All Armenians, and he himself was going to perform the sacrament. Saint Nersess was very meticulous about the ordinations he performed. He wanted the men whom he ordained to be valuable servants of the church.

On that Sunday as one approached the cathedral, one could see the horses held by the squires, covered with decorative hangings and trappings. The bishops and princes some of whom had traveled for days were in the cathedral, either taking part in the ceremony or standing at their appointed places among the congregation. The Armenians had a great respect for the Pahlavounis and the candidate to the priesthood belonged to that family. Some of the squires were so curious that they had left the horses to someone else's charge in order to come in and catch a glimpse of the new priest. As the ceremony drew to a close, he turned his full face to the congregation to give his first blessing: "Peace be unto all!" he intoned.

As the choir sang: "and with thy spirit," people whispered to each other: "how young he is!"

Nersess, as the new priest was called, was fifteen years of age. He already knew Greek and had read many books of theology written in that language, along with the important books of the fathers of the Armenian church. As he had shown in his conversations a remarkable intelligence, Saint Nersess, his mother's uncle, had deemed him worthy to become a priest of the Armenian church. The saint gave the new priest his own

name as a sign of special confidence in him. What the catholicos appreciated most of all was the young clergyman's good understanding of the Christian religion. The learned catholicos and his studious relative and pupil agreed with each other that it was a shame for the Christian churches to entertain feelings of dislike for each other and to refuse to each other the holy communion. Nersess had come to the conclusion, from the books he had read, that all the churches should be one in the love of Christ.

The young priest was very anxious to promote this Christian love. A few years after his ordination he wrote a book in which he examined the ideas of a very famous Greek theologian of the church: Cyril of Jerusalem. Cyril, who had lived many centuries earlier, was accepted by the Armenians as one of the fathers of the church and a book examining his ideas was a welcome addition to the literature of the Armenian church. This work, the sermons he preached and the many pamphlets he wrote made the name of Nersess familiar among the bishops, the princes and the people. He became an archbishop at the age of twenty-two.

As a rule a man cannot become an archbishop at the age of twenty-two. What made Nersess an exception was, along with his unusual competence, the fact that he belonged to the Pahlavouni family. Besides, he was being consecrated for the episcopal see of Lambron, and the prince of Lambron was his own brother. Nersess was at the same time the bishop of the city of Tarsus.

Within a year of his consecration Archbishop Nersess wrote another book explaining the meaning of the Divine Liturgy: he explained both the things said during that sacrament and the things done. To this day we use his book in order to understand our Patarag (or Badarak) better. Then in rapid succession he wrote several other works, including many commentaries on the books of the Old and New Testaments. His sermons displayed his profound and vast knowledge; he preached them with a fiery enthusiasm and people listened with fascination. Owing to his birth, his rank and his personality Archbishop Nersess became a man of considerable influence everywhere. When a man is

courageous and expresses new ideas boldly, other people cannot react to him with indifference. They become either his friends or his enemies. The archbishop of Lambron had many friends who liked him very much. Other people could not tolerate him and resented his being so influential both with the catholicos of all Armenians and with the baron of New Armenia.

Now since the days of Archbishop Nersess' childhood a great question had faced the Armenian people: should their church enter into communion with the Greek church? For long centuries the center of the Greek church (Constantinople) and the center of the Armenian church in Ancient Armenia had been far apart, and for a long, long time there had been only one sort of relationship between the Greeks and the Armenians: the Greeks had tried to bring the Armenian church entirely under their own control; they had tried to make of the Armenian catholicos a bishop under the orders of the patriarch of Constantinople. They had always asked the Armenians to reject their traditional beliefs and practices and accept the beliefs and practices of the Greek church. The Armenians had shied away from such subjection. They had investigated the truth, while honestly trying to remain faithful to the ancient faith of the one church of Christ, and they had come to different conclusions.

The situation had now changed. New Armenia had become an important military power. The center of the Armenian church had moved to a place closer to Constantinople. The emperor of Constantinople, Manuel Comnenus, was very much interested in the Armenians and wanted their support. The Greeks and the Armenians were in daily contact with each other, but they would become more friendly, they felt, only if their churches were in communion with each other. The Greek theologians this time examined closely and seriously the beliefs of the Armenian church and they declared, contrary to their usual practice, that the Armenians believed in the truth.

This was the situation when in 1179 Armenian bishops from all over New and Ancient Armenia began to assemble at the castle of Rhomcla, the residence of the catholicos of all Arme-

nians. They were coming to hold a council and discuss a matter of great importance. The emperor and the great synod (central church council) of the Greeks had written to the catholicos about the possibility of the two churches entering into communion with each other. Some of the Armenian bishops who came to Rhomcla from Ancient Armenia were more suspicious of the Greeks than their other colleagues. They remembered the many humiliations that the Armenians had suffered at the hands of the Greeks. But Catholicos Grigor IV and Archbishop Nersess in particular did not mind trying once more to come together in the love of Christ. They were even ready to make some concessions for the sake of unity, for the Greeks themselves had made concessions. On the other hand, the catholicos and the archbishop also were absolutely convinced of the truth of the basic convictions of their own church and hoped to convince the Greeks of the same. Archbishop Nersess spoke several times at the important council of Rhomcla with his customary zeal and presented persuasive arguments. In the end all the Armenian bishops agreed to send to the Greeks conciliatory letters. They expected the Greeks to answer favourably, but because of wars with the Turks, the letters did not arrive in Constantinople in good time. When they could be sent, the emperor had died, the situation had changed and the letters had become useless.

Eighteen years later the king of New Armenia, Leo II, wished to consolidate his friendship with the Greeks once more. Again the question was raised of the two churches entering into communion with each other. The most competent man that the king could send to Constantinople to conduct the conferences was of course Archbishop Nersess. He set out for the Greek capital with great hopes. "At last," he would say to himself, "Christ will triumph. Two great churches will become one in Him." When the conferences opened in Constantinople, some of the observers marvelled at the archbishop's capacity to present his point of view and to answer objections. They compared him to a dove sitting among vultures, but a dove who would not be intimidated because the Holy Spirit inspired him. Yet capable as he was and

willing to come to an understanding, Archbishop Nersess left Constantinople greatly disappointed. His soul was in agony. He had found out that the Greeks were clinging to words without getting at the spirit behind the words. His ideals were dashed to the ground. He felt that Christ was being betrayed once more because some people were narrow-minded and could not see that truth was greater than themselves. Petty considerations stood in the way of great achievements.

Archbishop Nersess knew Latin as well as Greek. At the time, the head of the Latin church and the emperor of Germany were also interested in the Armenians and wanted to make friends with them. The German emperor gave a crown to the Armenian king Leo II with the sanction of the pope; the crown was brought to Armenia by Cardinal Conrad. Archbishop Nersess had had many other occasions to deal with the Latins. Whenever he saw that others had something good that he did not know about, he adopted it fearlessly. He himself was an ascetic person and was satisfied with very little; but when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy he wore ornate silk vestments in honor of Christ and ordered his priests to do likewise. All the Armenian clergymen do the same today, but brown or black sackcloth had been worn before his time in the performance of the Divine Liturgy.

One Sunday the great archbishop was preaching at Tarsus one of his great sermons in which he put all his soul. He collapsed in the middle of the sermon. He was forty-five years old. Archbishop Nersess of Lambron fought valiantly until his last breath for the unity of the church universal.

Introduction to Story XXIV

Leo II of New Armenia was crowned a king on January 6, 1199. In order both to receive and to keep the crown he needed the help of the pope, and this political necessity naturally created in Cilicia an atmosphere in which the Latins could thrive. Leo himself was clearly aware of the distinction between political expediency and serious concession. He never encouraged the sort of concession to the Latins which would place the authenticity of the Armenian church in jeopardy.

Leo II died in 1219. This first and greatest king of New Armenia did not leave a male descendant. He had bequeathed the throne to his daughter Zabel or Isabelle who was, nevertheless, too young to govern when her father died. A regency was formed. One of the regents, Baron Constantine, outlived the two others (Cyr Adan, possibly a Greek prince, and Catholicos Hovhanness VI of Siss). As the first marriage of Zabel to a Frank prince proved politically undesirable, Constantine arranged, in 1226, her second marriage to his son Hethoum. Zabel was eleven years old at the time of her second marriage. Hethoum who upon becoming her husband received the crown, was two years older. Constantine kept the reins of government for a time. (Queen Zabel died at thirty-seven, the mother of three sons and five daughters. She had spent many years of her life serving as an ordinary nurse in a hospital that she herself had built in the city of Siss).

During the reign of Hethoum I the Tartars who had made their appearance once before in eastern Asia Minor under Genghis Khan, returned. Their previous attack had met with some resistance in Armenia proper, but that had not prevented them from spreading ruin and death over the whole country. In 1227 Genghis Khan died. Rather than engage in battle with them, Hethoum I sought an alliance with the Tartar army, inasmuch as many Christians, probably Nes-

torians, were fighting in it. He thereupon undertook his celebrated journey to Karakorum, the residence of Mangou Khan, on the northern shores of the Caspian Sea near the mouth of the Volga River. The meeting was friendly and a treaty of mutual help was signed.

The Tartars did not wish to disregard the stipulations of the treaty, but they were not in a position to help the Armenians when the sultan of Egypt, the common enemy, invaded New Armenia. The Egyptians captured many Cilician fortresses, committing unprecedented barbarities, and carried off Hethoum's son, Leo. The Armenian king had to agree to the terms of an armistice dictated by the Egyptians. Leo was released in July 1268. Hethoum left the throne to his son, became a monk, changed his name to Macarius, and withdrew to a monastery where he died within three years.

The wars between the Armenians and the Egyptians resumed during the reign of Leo III who died in 1289. He was succeeded by his son, Hethoum II who had become a Franciscan monk, changing his name, on that occasion, to "Brother John". Thus New Armenia found herself in the uncomfortable position of having as king a monk of the Latin faith who remained a friend of the Tartars and wielded the sword against the Arabs for the defense of his land. Once, as a result of conflicting claims, Hethoum's brother, Simbat, had him blinded, but one of his eyes was nursed back to health—miraculously, some say. The Latins give him the title of *Beatus*. Hethoum tried his utmost to have the Armenians accept the papal supremacy and the rites and doctrines of the Latin church. When for the last time he ostensibly withdrew from his kingly duties (which he was in the habit of performing in his Franciscan garb), he left the unfinished work of union with the Roman church to his nephew, Leo IV. But that was an impossible endeavour. Both Hethoum and his nephew were plotted against and killed by the Mongols in 1307. Since the Tartars were the allies of the Armenians, the motives of that plot remain a mystery. Some say that certain individuals, incensed by the latinophile policies of Hethoum II, used the Tartars to have him liquidated. The fact is that toward the end of Hethoum's reign the Moslem religion had penetrated the Tartar masses and the latter's friendship with the Armenians was considerably diminished. New Armenia itself was declining rapidly.

During the period covered above (1199-1307) these were the catholicoi of note: Hovhanness VI of Siss (1203-1221) worked har-

moniously in Cilicia with Leo II during the latter part of his pontificate. It is also at this time that the titular heads of all the important sees of Armenia proper died. Since they could not be replaced, the authority of Hovhanness increased considerably among all the Armenians. A contemporary of Hovhanness VI is Mekhithar Gaush, a revered monk and competent theologian, imbued with the spirit of ecclesiastical discipline. He was instrumental in removing tensions that existed among the different sees of the Armenian church. He himself was a native of the region of Hal'bat (Haghpat) in Armenia proper.

Constantine I (1221-1267) convened in 1243, that is, during the reign of Hethoum I, the Council of Siss where several canons were passed with the general aim of correcting excesses of behaviour, practices due to laziness and ignorance, and particularly the custom of rendering sacramental services for a fee. The necessity of having saintly, learned and responsible bishops was stressed. The decisions of the Council of Siss were sent to Armenia proper for the approval and signature of the "eastern" clergymen. These clergymen signed the document, for they did not deem it proper to contradict an order coming from a superior.

Constantine II (1286-1289) was dethroned by Hethoum II allegedly for improper conduct, but it was clear enough that the king's real motive was the anti-Latin attitude of the catholicos. Rhomcla fell to the Mamluk Ashraf Khalil, during his pontificate. The catholicos was taken as a prisoner to Cairo. He died there during the great famine of 1293.

His successor, Grigor VII of Anavarz, a learned and saintly catholicos, is known for his personal sympathy for the Latins. He went so far as to mix water with the wine of the Eucharist, a practice the refusal of which by the Armenians had been a *casus belli* since the first Armenian- Latin encounter. Grigor VII thus earned the nickname of "waterer". In his time Hethoum II, as well as those who took his place at the court during his several withdrawals to the Franciscan monastery, were adherents of the Latin church.

The life of Stephen Orbelian, a bishop of Armenia proper consecrated by Catholicos Constantine II, must be studied against the background presented above. We can then readily see that in the thirteenth century the doctrinal and ritual leadership of the Armenian church had passed to Cilicia.

A DEFENDER OF
ARMENIAN CHURCH TRADITION
(THE STORY OF BISHOP STEPHEN ORBELIAN)

A small group of men riding mules and horses were slowly advancing through the mountains and valleys of Mesopotamia. It was bitter cold and the men were wrapped in sheepskins. One of the mules was loaded with gifts to be given to the king and to the catholicos. The man riding the handsomest horse was Stephen Orbelian, a priest. He was going to the castle of Rhomclia to be consecrated a bishop by the catholicos of all Armenians.

Stephen Orbelian was the son of the Armenian atabeg (chief of province) of Sewnik. In the latter part of the thirteenth century most of Ancient Armenia had been entirely taken by the Tartars, a fierce Asiatic race. They had killed and destroyed everything in their way, and the Armenians had suffered unspeakably at their hands, along with many other peoples. But Stephen Orbelian's uncle Simbat, a man of wisdom and courage, had found a way of living with the Tartars. He had even acquired a measure of independence and had assumed the governorship of the Armenian province of Sewnik. In fact the province of Sewnik was like a haven in a war-torn world. It was a land to the southeast of Lake Sevan, then known as Lake Gelakhouni. Simbat ruled it, he himself being subject to the Tartar khan. The Armenians of the province were not persecuted for their religion. The Tartars fought other peoples because they wanted their lands and possessions, not because they belonged to another faith. Therefore the Armenians of Sewnik were not under pressure to change their faith or to revise it, as they were in Cilicia. As long as they paid their taxes and were willing to fight for the Tartar khan, they could keep their religion and worship their God as they pleased.

It was from the province of Sewnik that Stephen Orbelian was coming. At last he saw the waters of the river Euphrates, and then he knew that they had covered over two-thirds of the way. The journey was long, hazardous and tiresome. All that remained was to wait for the barges, cross the river Euphrates and, in another day or two, they would be at Siss, the capital of New Armenia.

At Siss Stephen Orbelian learned that the catholicos had recently died. Naturally this brought about lively and sometimes hateful discussions. The great question that the bishops, princes, priests and people of Armenia had in their minds was: who will be the next catholicos? The one person who was more interested in this issue than anyone else was King Leo III. He had to work most closely with the head of the church. And his spiritual associate should be liked not only by the people and allies of New Armenia but also by the people of Ancient Armenia, and particularly by the Armenians of the province of Sewnik, which contained the most important ecclesiastical sees of the fatherland. In one of these sees in particular Leo III was very much interested: the see of Tathev, in Sewnik. He had formerly made generous gifts to it, and now he was glad to have with him the very priest who had come to be consecrated in order to return as the bishop of that same see.

“Tell me, Father,” said the king to Stephen Orbelian, “tell me about the conditions in your part of the world. You know how much we are interested in the destiny of all the children of the Armenian people. Perhaps some day, God willing, we shall again be the rightful ruler of all the lands between this, our New Armenia and Ancient Armenia, our real fatherland that was taken away from our people. That was the dream of our grandfather and namesake, Leo I of blessed memory. But right now our hopes are dim. The Tartars are our friends, but the Egyptians are giving us much trouble.”

Humbly and with great precision the young priest gave the king all the pertinent information about the province of Sewnik and about the other provinces of northern Armenia, now under

Tartar rule. He had already given to the king letters from his uncle Simbat Orbelian and from his father Tarsaij. He informed him that there had been some disputes among the bishops of Sewnik, and that there were now two monasteries, Noravank and Tathev, with an episcopal see in each. He told His Majesty that, according to his father, who was a devout Christian and a competent leader, rather than try to reconcile the two disputing bishops, Sewnik should have a “metropolitan”, or a vicar of the catholicos over the other bishops of the province.

The king knew that no one was better suited to that post of metropolitan than Stephen Orbelian himself. And that was exactly the wish of many people in Sewnik, including of course Stephen's father.

In the meantime New Armenia had a new catholicos in the person of Constantine II of Catouc. It was a pleasure for the new catholicos to consecrate Stephen Orbelian to the episcopacy. It was an unusual occasion: the catholicos in *New Armenia* was consecrating a bishop for a see in *Ancient Armenia*. The new bishop received many sumptuous gifts, mostly vestments. Among the expensive gifts there were two episcopal headgears of two different styles. One of them was a mitre. When Bishop Stephen returned to his see in 1287, his celebration of his first episcopal Divine Liturgy at the cathedral of Tathev was an event of extraordinary interest. People in *Ancient Armenia* had seen bishops celebrate the Divine Liturgy many, many times; but never before had they seen an Armenian bishop wearing a mitre.

Bishop Stephen had brought with him official documents signed by Catholicos Constantine to the effect that he was to be the vicar of the catholicos in the province of Sewnik. One of the first things he did, when he arrived at Tathev, was to pay an official visit to the Tartar khan who was not a Christian himself, but a friend of the Christians nevertheless. His name was Argoun. The bishop explained to him the laws according to which the Armenian church was governed, and the great respect in which the catholicos was held. He then gave the khan the letter of Catholicos Constantine.

"Read it to me in translation," the khan said.

As he emerged from the khan's residence, Bishop Stephen was not only the vicar of the province of Sewnik, but also the lord of the territories that he had inherited from his father, Tar-saij. Furthermore, the khan had declared the churches and monasteries of Sewnik tax exempt.

When Bishop Stephen assumed his functions, the buildings of Tathev and of the other monasteries and churches of Sewnik were in a state of deterioration. He had the monastery and the cathedral of Tathev rebuilt, at the same time building and re-building other churches and public institutions. Bishop Stephen took advantage of the peaceful conditions in his province to introduce better discipline into the Armenian church, and to renew her life in various other ways. He paid particular attention to the church services, for he wanted them to be performed according to custom and tradition. He did not want to see any deviation, however slight, from the ancient teachings of the church.

One day as Bishop Stephen was working in his office a priest came in and announced a visitor from Siss, the capital of New Armenia. The visitor was Bishop Constantine of Caesarea; he introduced himself as an envoy of the catholicos of all Armenians.

The catholicos of all Armenians was now Grigor VII of Anavarz. The envoy had in his satchel an encyclical letter from His Holiness. After the usual greetings Bishop Stephen took the letter and read it. It was a long letter. One could see him becoming more and more disturbed as he continued to read. Then he lifted his eyes and looked at the envoy:

"This is a very serious matter," he said, "I must convene a meeting of the bishops, princes, priests and various learned men of Sewnik before I can answer it."

The year was 1297. The meeting was held at once. The contents of the letter were put on the table for discussion. But they did not have to discuss for long. The catholicos was asking the opinions of the clergymen of Armenia about certain changes in the customs, practices and beliefs of the Armenian church which

some people thought it advisable to introduce. One of the contemplated changes was, for example, to allow the Armenians to walk into a Latin church and receive holy communion. This was equivalent to betraying their own church and the claims on which their forefathers had insisted. The participants in the meeting were clearly opposed to any change. They wished to keep intact the beliefs and practices of the Armenian church; they wished to keep them as they had been transmitted to them by their predecessors. Then they decided to write a letter to the catholicos, explaining and justifying their attitude. They begged Catholicos Grigor VII of Anavarz whom they respectfully called "source of faith" and "fearless champion of the holy church" to let them be faithful to the fathers who had led and taught the Armenian Christians through the centuries. Constantine, the bishop of Caesarea, took their letter to the catholicos.

Grigor VII wished to hold a meeting of his own to consider the letter of the bishops and princes of Ancient Armenia, but he died before he had an opportunity to do so. In the end the opinions of Bishop Stephen Orbelian and of his colleagues prevailed.

The meeting inspired Bishop Orbelian to write an essay on the teachings of the Armenian church. However a more important work is his history of the province of Sewnik. We still have this *History*. Without it, we would not have known of the things we do know about the events of his times, including those related in this story.

Bishop Stephen died in 1304.

Introduction to Story XXV

In the introduction to our last story we said a word about Leo IV, the successor of Hethoum II. Leo was only a boy when Hethoum placed him on the throne. This allowed Hethoum to keep in closer touch with his Latin colleagues while remaining the real power behind the scene. Leo was assassinated, along with Hethoum, in 1307 after less than three years of nominal rule, and was succeeded by his brother Oshin. The new king's first obligation was to drive out of his domains certain Tartar elements, the followers of Bilarghou who had ordered the murder of his brother and uncle. It is worthy of note that the great Tartar khan, Larphanda, upon learning the reasons of the Armenian king's action against the Tartars, not only condemned his own general Bilarghou to death, but paid blood money as compensation for the act that his general had committed.

King Oshin is remembered for his efforts to rebuild and put back on its feet, as it were, his battered kingdom, and to do so he still relied upon help from the Latins. On one occasion he requested of the pope urgent military assistance against the enemy. The pope sent six Franciscans to advise him on matters of policy. These six monks were thus added by the Vatican to the already abundant number of Latin monks in New Armenia who taught the Latin faith in an effort to prepare popular support for the more official negotiations that were being carried on at the court. The increasingly precarious political and military position of Armenia played more and more into the hands of the pope. Indeed a weak Armenia was more likely to accept his condition: namely, that the Armenians should recognize the pope as the vicar of Christ on earth, and obey him in matters of doctrine and ritual.

In his efforts to please the papacy King Oshin traveled all the way to Ancient Armenia in order to convince the bishops there of the advantages of joining the Latin church. In his own kingdom he

did not hesitate to use force in a sly and brutal manner to suppress a popular uprising, led mostly by vardapets, against the latinization of the court. This uprising which took place in 1309 is not the only one of its kind and deserves close attention:

We may remember, from our last story, Constantine of Caesarea, the envoy of Catholicos Grigor VII of Anavarz. This same Constantine succeeded Grigor and became catholicos in 1307. The mere fact that he was supported by Hethoum II or "Brother John" indicates something of his attitude in the Latin-Armenian controversies of the time. Taking advantage of the meeting that was convened on the occasion of Constantine's accession to the see, Hethoum read to the assembled clergymen a letter that had been written to him personally by the previous catholicos, Grigor of Anavarz. On the basis of this letter certain decisions were hastily taken at that council which amount, collectively, to the union of the Latin and Armenian churches. But the binding authority of this council composed almost entirely of Cilician bishops was never established, and its decisions, reconsidered at Adana in 1316, were never abided by, save at the court and at the catholicate where Constantine of Caesarea openly sided with Rome in all things.

The popular uprising mentioned above was against the decisions of that council of Siss. The issues had by now been crystallized and the people were opposed to three specific innovations: the use of water in the eucharistic wine, the celebration of the birth of Christ on December 25, and the attribution to Christ of "two natures." In more general terms, there was a clear cleavage, due to divergent interests, between the court and the princely families on one side, and the people on the other. The people were attached to the land; they *had* to stay put and thus bore the brunt of the everlasting wars. The princes were far more mobile; they kept marrying Frank princesses, as Oshin did twice, and this placed their security in their European family ties. Nor was an element of sport lacking in some of the wars they conducted. As for the bishops, their common privileges with the princes made them side with the latter for a time, but in the days of Hacob (James) II of Anavarz who died in 1320, there was already a chasm developing between the princes of the Armenian state and the princes of the Armenian church.

The pope as well as the kings of Europe were interested in Armenia largely as a land of potential converts and as a springboard

for their projected grand attack against Egypt. The latter country was suspicious of New Armenia for this very reason and a break with the pope would mean the welcome end of these dangerous Egyptian suspicions. Yet in 1335 Oshin's successor, Leo V, put his trust in the Vatican once more. At the time a *modus vivendi* had been established between Cilicia and Egypt. But a promise of help by the pope (Benedict XII) and the king of France (Philip VI) encouraged Leo V to war with the forces of the sultan. The pope's promised help was the sum of 1000 florins which was withheld pending investigations into the position of the Armenian church vis-a-vis Rome. The sultan, on the other hand, refrained from bringing the Armenian kingdom to an end upon Leo's simple oath, taken on the Bible, that he would cease his flirtations with the papacy. Later the pope was pleased to absolve Leo of this oath taken under duress.

Leo V died in 1342, possibly killed by anti-Latins. The crown of New Armenia then passed to a French family of the grand nobility, the de Lusignans. The growing discontent of the Armenian people with the Latins reached its climax during the short rule of the last de Lusignan, Leo VI. When the forces of the sultan arrived at Siss, a desperate and quite hopeless resistance was made. In the end Catholicos Paul'os I headed a delegation which surrendered to the Egyptian army. Thus on the Monday of the Holy Week of 1375 the kingdom of New Armenia came to an end.

Latin influence in Armenia proper spread through the work of one Hovhanness (John) of Kirna. He was a student of Yessayi (Isaiah) of Nich, a famous educator in the Province of Sewnik. Hovhanness studied under a Latin bishop sent to the Caucasus for missionary purposes by Pope John XXII. When he returned he had become a Latin convert. He won over twelve Armenian clergymen and together they founded the *Unitor* order; the Augustinian rule of that order was ratified by the pope. It was a preaching order of the Dominican type. Their purpose was no less than the conversion to the Latin creed and ritual of the entire Armenian church, nor are they reported to have been very scrupulous in the choice of their means to that end.

It is against the background of this massive Latin effort to win over the Armenians that the work of educators like Gregory of Tathev must be viewed and appraised.

THE MOST FAMOUS ARMENIAN TEACHER (THE STORY OF SAINT GREGORY OF TATHEV)

Two Armenian monks were talking in muffled voices in the courtyard of the monastery of Apracounik. For the past several days all the monks of that monastery had been asked to remember in their prayers their great teacher, Hovhanness Vorotnetsi or John of Vorotn. They had been asked to pray for his health.

"How is he?" asked one of the monks.

"He looks better, but very sick people do sometimes look much better just before they leave this world," answered his companion.

This conversation took place shortly after the feast of Theophany of the year 1388. Hovhanness Vorotnetsi was seventy-three years old and he was rapidly ebbing away. The monks of the monastery were used to his energy and enthusiasm. They wanted him to be with them a little longer so that he might continue to teach and guide them. They needed his leadership in their fight against those who had made it their business to discredit the Armenian church. These were the people known as the *Unitors*.

The Unitors wrote books against the beliefs of the Armenian church; they held public debates and translated the works of Latin writers and distributed them among the Armenians. They themselves were Armenians who had embraced the Latin faith. One had to be well informed and clever in order to bring out the truth of the Armenian beliefs and counter the arguments of the Unitors. Hovhanness Vorotnetsi argued against the Unitors whenever the occasion arose, but he also wanted to do a lasting work. He educated many young people and encouraged them to learn the language of their opponents as he himself had

done. He wrote commentaries on the Bible and particularly on the Gospel according to Saint John and on the Letters of Saint Paul. The Bible was the most important book from which the champions both of the Armenian and Latin churches drew their arguments; it was therefore important that it be understood well.

Hovhanness Vorotnetsi was born for a life of fruitful work; he had kept all the difficult rules of the monastery all his life. Even now, ill as he was, he did not wish to remain idle. Great men want to live fully or not at all.

Hovhanness had one more thing to do before the end. He called to his bedside all his former students who were now no longer students but teachers in their turn. Among them was the most famous of all, Gregory of Tathev. Gregory held a very special place in the master's heart. They had met twenty-eight years earlier at Tbilisi in Georgia. At the time Gregory's name was Khoutloushah. Neither the master nor his younger friend could ever forget that day. The former could never hope to find a brighter student; the latter knew he would never meet a more competent teacher. Together they had gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Upon their return they had stopped at the chapel on Mount Sepouh which contained the tomb of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. Khoutloushah was there ordained a deacon, and then a priest, and his name was changed to Gregory in memory of the saint whose tomb they were visiting. Gregory had always wanted to be a priest. In fact, his parents had vowed that he would be a priest if he lived, for all their other children had died very young.

At Hovhanness' bedside, as he and Gregory looked at each other, they remembred all their wonderful moments together; the places they had seen, the conversations they had had, the incidents that had struck their fancy as well as the solemn hours of prayer and worship in the same chapel. They had fought together for the same cause: to defend the Armenian church against her enemies and make her shine with the glory of Christ. All these memories came before them in a flash, and now the end was near. But they were not downcast. In their sadness there

was a secret joy. The master knew that his pupil was going to surpass him in knowledge and wisdom. Indeed he had already done so. Hovhanness invited all those present to kneel down and he blessed them all. Then he gave his last will and testament:

"The hour will soon strike," he said, "when I will go and join my Creator in heaven. I want you all to work for our cause more relentlessly than ever. When I am gone do not let greed and pride make you lose sight of your real mission which is to make of our church a house where our ever living Lord Jesus Christ will be pleased to dwell. I appoint as my successor Father Gregory. From this moment on you owe obedience to him and from him you will continue to learn."

Hovhanness Vorotnetsi died a few days later, on the thirteenth of January. His disciples could not have wished for anyone other than Gregory of Tathev to take his place. They looked up to him as a source from which Christian wisdom pours forth ever more abundantly. They knew him to be "the sun that never sets", "a second Gregory the Enlightener", "the Teacher of all Armenians", "higher (in wisdom and knowledge) than all the philosophers and teachers, ancient and modern".

In the latter part of the fourteenth century the province of Sewnik was about the only place in the world where the Armenians enjoyed some peace. Tathev was, as we know, a village in this province. It was Gregory more than anyone else who made the monastery of that village famous, for he moved there in 1390, two years after the death of his teacher Hovhanness. Soon after that date the monastery of Tathev became the foremost university of the Armenian church. "There," says the historian, "Gregory enlightened our nation in the true and orthodox confession and faith."

At the university of the monastery of Tathev lessons were taught in different departments: in one of these the students learned the Christian teachings, using the Bible and the writings of the fathers of the Armenian church; in another department they learned Greek philosophy; in yet another department they learned music and the art of painting. In this department they

learned particularly the art of drawing colored pictures in the margins or at the top of the pages of the books which were copied by hand. Another art about which Gregory was very meticulous was that of handwriting. He wanted his students to write as legibly and as beautifully as possible, without mistakes and using the correct forms of abbreviation. Besides all these, the curriculum included of course the Armenian language and the art of preaching. Before receiving the authorization to preach a priest must have successfully completed all these courses. He would then become a "vardapet" or "doctor", a doctor being a person who is authorized to teach. The vardapets would receive from their master a staff which they would hold while preaching. Sometimes a preacher would be greeted by the people after a particularly good sermon. They would then invariably ask him: "Who gave you your staff?" The preacher who could answer: "I received my staff from Gregory of Tathev" was very much pleased indeed!

Some of the students of Tathev were even more ambitious. They wanted to become teachers of teachers, or *dzayragouyn* vardapets. To be a *dzayragouyn* vardapet was an exceptional achievement, and it required of course many more years of study. It was more difficult to be a *dzayragouyn* vardapet than a bishop; and many bishops who were also *dzayragouyn* vardapets would add the latter title to their signature.

These degrees were granted in a special ceremony, prepared by Gregory himself, that took place in the church of the monastery. He was the main speaker on these occasions, and the things that he had to say were so deeply grafted on the minds of his graduating students that it was impossible to forget them. On one occasion, in the course of an address to the graduating class of *dzayragouyn* vardapets—seated in their special chairs—he said:

"You know that for a clergyman to sit on a chair during a ceremony is a special privilege and the sign of authority. You have now acquired that privilege. You have authority to preach from one end of the world to the other and no one has the right

to place obstacles in your way . . . but that only means that you are more responsible than the others. You must be solid in your faith like a rock that cannot be moved. No shortcomings must mar your faith, your discipline or your religion . . . and above all you must *first* practice virtue and *then* preach it."

These were grave words. Gregory who was a dzayragouyn vardapet himself, attached more importance to learning than to titles. When he spoke he had in mind the army of Unitors who were as busy as ever confusing the Armenian faithful. Many Unitors were learned people and only learned people could fight them.

Gregory had a perfect knowledge of Latin and Greek. From his manner of writing in Armenian one can see that he had read all the important Latin works which his opponents used in arguments against him. This is one reason why he was unbeatable in the public debates which were something of an entertainment to the people and an occasion for the disputants to sharpen their wits. Gregory put most of his teachings in a book called in Armenian *Girk Hartsmants* (Book of Sentences). In this book he examines all the problems of faith and gives to the "questions" involved the answers of the Armenian church. He also wrote two books of sermons, and from them we can gather the degree of interest with which people listened to them. They would come from great distances to hear these sermons.

In the last year of his life Saint Gregory went to the city of Arjesh, on the northern shores of Lake Van to settle a dispute. He was convinced that the Armenian church must remain as one flock with one shepherd, the shepherd being the catholicos of all Armenians. Saint Gregory died upon his return to his beloved monastery of Tathev on December 25, 1410.

Introduction to Story XXVI

We describe the fall of Siss as the end of an era in Armenian history. But the change that that event produced in the life of the people then living was not very radical. By 1375 the Cilician "kingdom" consisted of no more than one or two fortresses, and the French king of the Armenians no longer exercised any effective control over the baronets who lived as independently as they could in the different parts of the land. After the capture of Siss by the Egyptian forces these baronets continued to live as the lords of their tiny principalities, making and breaking alliances with their neighbouring fortresses and relying upon their peasants and artisans to provide them with food and the necessities of life. There was even a regrouping of Armenian noblemen around one Constantine who is sometimes referred to as "king". They now owed tribute to the emir of Aleppo, a liege of the sultan of Egypt. The emir ruled Cilicia through a governor.

Catholicos Paul'os I, taken captive by the Egyptians in 1375, was eventually released upon his promise that he and his people would be loyal subjects of the sultan. He returned to Siss to resume his duties which he proceeded to perform as well as the circumstances allowed. He was now free from direct Latin pressure and this gave him a measure of freedom in the exercise of his religious functions. The Moslems did not persecute the Armenians for their religion, though they did grant financial privileges to those who embraced Islam. Another form of pressure was the condemnation to death of converts from Islam back to Christianity. For many unscrupulous people a convenient way of being rid of a Christian rival or enemy was to say that he had been a Moslem. Yet the "accusation" was not always unfounded. Our chroniclers mention many Armenian martyrs who, having once embraced Islam, regretted the apostasy and then proclaimed their Christianity braving torture and death.

Catholicos Paul'os I died in 1382 and was succeeded by Theodoros. With the latter the Armenian church in Cilicia enters a period

of decadence: the office of catholicos is now sought for its financial and other privileges; bishops and priests take advantage of people's credulity for purposes that are far from honorable; simony, that is, ordination or consecration to the order of priest or bishop for a fee (Acts VIII:18,19), is rife. In this generally chaotic condition six catholicoi followed each other until Constantine VI who died in 1439. Intrigues and poisonings are part of the history of the church at this time, not only in Cilicia but also in Asia Minor and Europe. All but one of the six catholicoi under consideration seem to have cared little for the purity of Armenian beliefs and practices. The exception was Paul'os II (1418-1430), a former patriarch of the Armenian monastery of Saint James of Jerusalem, who had been sent to Cilicia to investigate the condition of the church there and advise on the possibility of transferring the see of catholicos back to Etchmiadzin. This mission was entrusted to him by the clergymen of Armenia proper, notably by those of the provinces of Vaspouracan and Sewnik.

For obvious reasons the "eastern" clergymen concluded that the See of Catholicos of All Armenians should return to its original site: one of the more important of these reasons was the fact that in Cilicia the see was still in danger of falling victim to Latin ambitions. Latin influence was revived after the death of Paul'os II during the reign of Constantine VI mentioned above. The gradual and forceful spread of the Ottoman empire led to this revival. The origins of the Ottoman empire go back to 1227 at which time Turkish tribes settled down within the sultanate of Iconium or Konya, a city in the southern half of modern Turkey, almost directly below Ankara.

By 1439 the Ottoman sultan Mourad II had occupied most of Asia Minor and was threatening Constantinople. The Greek emperor John and Patriarch Joseph asked the pope for help against the Ottoman Turks, and according to the usual pattern the pope invited them to join the Roman church as a preliminary condition to the dispatch of assistance. A meeting took place in that year at Firenze (Florence). The deliberations gave birth to a temporary "union". Pope Eugenius IV wished to include the Armenians also in this "union" and, with four vardapets, seems to have come to his celebrated "agreement". The agreement developed into an epistle addressed to the Armenians and purporting to teach them the Catholic truth. It has the peculiarity of being written to a dead catholicos, for Constantine VI, to whom the document was addressed in November 1439, had died in April of

that year. The Armenian party to the agreement was not composed of official representatives of the entire Armenian church. They were sent from Crimea on the insistence of the Genoese governor of that peninsula where a large Armenian colony had settled during the previous two centuries.

Armenian political autonomy had vanished in Cilicia, the see of catholicos was in a decadent condition and the dangers of latinization had increased. There was no reason why the see should continue to be in Siss. The Armenian clergymen of the east proceeded to work for its transfer to Etchmiadzin with renewed vigor. It took place in 1441 during the reign, in Cilicia, of Grigor IX Moussapekiants. In Armenia proper there was a short period of peace following the country's emergence from a reign of famine, wanton bloodshed and terror, under the governorship, at Yerevan, of Yaghoub Bey. In 1387 Armenia had been subjected to the barbarities of Timur i Leng, a military genius and a madman whose diseased ego was satisfied by the sight of heaps of skulls, by hearing the cries of men being buried alive or by watching thousands of children, tied together, smashed by wild horses mounted by wilder horsemen. A symbol of the terror and yet determination of the Armenians not to surrender their dignity is the otherwise unknown "brave woman of Moush" who in her flight from the Tartar hordes slew, in the final moment of desperation, her own boy who was running with her; she clutched his bleeding body against herself and leapt to her death down a precipice, "glorifying the name of Jesus Christ". Timur was followed in Armenia by a Turkoman, Iskender, equally ill-famed. He killed "more men than the stars" and was killed in turn by his mother and his own son. Jihan Shah, Iskender's brother, was a better man. Yaghoub Bey, mentioned above, was Jihan's deputy.

The transfer of the see constitutes one of the most colorful pages of Armenian church history. In this move of capital importance high and noble motives combined with secret ambitions and resulted in bitter clashes. (The bishop or "catholicos" of Al'thamar, Zechariah, would have opposed the transfer had he known in time that *he* was not destined to be the catholicos of all Armenians at Etchmiadzin.)

It is the emergence from obscurity of a "dark horse" which finally put an end to the rivalries of the competing aspirants to the see. Moussapekiants, in Cilicia, ceased to function as Catholicos of All Armenians.

THE SEE GOES BACK TO ETCHMIADZIN

(THE ELECTION OF CATHOLICOS KIRACOSS I)

Dean Hovhanness of the monastery of Tathev was sitting alone in his cell, when suddenly his eyes fell on the book of sermons that Gregory, the former dean, had written with his own hand. The new dean had read all the sermons in that book. And now he remembered the conversations he had had with the author who had been his teacher.

"He was right; oh yes, he was absolutely right," he said to himself.

Hovhanness (or John) of Hermon, was thinking of the odd situation in which the Armenian church found herself at that time. Gregory, his "thrice great" teacher, had taught that one church should have one catholicos, and Hovhanness himself believed this. The fact was nevertheless that the Armenian church had, then, *two* catholicoi. The bishop of Al'thamar, at a distance of less than two hundred miles southwest of Tathev, claimed that he was the catholicos of Greater, that is of Ancient, Armenia. And secondly, there was the catholicos of all Armenians, with his headquarters still at the city of Siss, in Cilicia.

Cilicia, in Asia Minor, was no longer an Armenian kingdom. It was a land, at a considerable distance from Armenia, where Armenian princes had maintained a kingdom for about three hundred years. But now the Egyptians had taken it, and the catholicos of all Armenians was thus residing in a city which was no longer Armenian but foreign. A solution ought to be found to this abnormal situation. Hovhanness of Hermon thought of Thomas of Medzop who could work with him toward that solution.

Thomas was an abbot. He too had been a disciple of Gregory of Tathev. He agreed with Hovhanness wholeheartedly, even

though he was under the jurisdiction of the "catholicos" of Al'thamar.

Not many days passed before Abbot Thomas came to visit Dean Hovhanness. As they sat and talked together, a casual listener would be under the impression that they were merely exchanging ideas about matters concerning the church. Many people in many places did that at the time, as people have done always. But the conversations between Hovhanness of Hermon and Thomas of Medzop were not idle talk. They were destined to produce a major change in the history of the Armenian church.

"I see no reason at all," Dean Hovhanness said, "why His Holiness should still be in Siss. You and I know and everyone else knows that several centuries ago the Armenian catholicos left the land of Armenia and went to Cilicia because our princes went there and because we had in that part of the world a more or less independent kingdom. It was good for the head of the church to be with the head of the state so as to plan and do things together for the benefit of the Armenian people. But why should the catholicos be in Siss now? *This is the land where the catholicos should reside and where his see belongs.*"

"And that is only *one* reason why the catholicos should come back to Armenia," said Abbot Thomas of Medzop. "If the head of the Armenian church remains in Cilicia much longer, he may fall victim to the intrigues of the Unitors, as he almost did more than once already. The Unitors have enough money, they are clever and they work hard. In order to be protected against their propaganda we must be united around the head of our church and this cannot be done as long as he lives so far away from us. We do not have any details as to what is going on in Cilicia; and what we do know is not very encouraging." Thomas lowered his voice. "We hear news of things done that are unbecoming to clergymen and laymen alike," he said.

It was late in the afternoon. The two vardapets went to the chapel for the evening services. Thomas of Medzop went to the chapel again the next day for the early morning worship and

then he headed for his own monastery, riding a mule. Except for an occasional word with the monk who was accompanying him, he kept turning the idea over and over in his head. The see of catholicos *should* be transferred to Etchmiadzin. The move would take the see out of the influence of the Unitors. The catholicos of all Armenians would once more live and work where Saint Gregory the Enlightener had lived and worked. But would Grigor IX Moussapegiants, who was then the catholicos in Cilicia, be willing to make the move? And if he refused, what then? Who would be the new catholicos? There were many powerful bishops in Armenia; would *they* agree? Besides, Greater Armenia was no more independent than Cilicia. The region of Etchmiadzin was under the rule of a Moslem called Yaghoub Bey. What would *he* say? And, above all, was it really God's will that the see be transferred? Then, quite suddenly, an idea seemed to explode in his head:

"The hand!" he exclaimed. The word came out of his mouth in a rather loud voice. His companion heard him and was startled.

"What hand, Lord Thomas?" he asked.

"Never mind, Brother, I was talking to myself," said the abbot.

He was actually thinking of the relics of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. These relics had been encased in a silver box shaped like a right hand. The catholicos of all Armenians used it to bless the holy myron or oil for the performance of certain sacraments. It was also used in the consecration of bishops. Whenever the catholicos issued encyclicals in which blessings were imparted to all the people, he would write: "We impart our apostolic blessings from the Hand of our Enlightener Gregory". *The Hand of the Enlightener*, as the silver-encased relics were called, was the sign of the true authority of the catholicos. It was therefore closely guarded by him. "If the hand could be brought to Etchmiadzin," Abbot Thomas thought, "the problem would be largely solved."

No sooner did Abbot Thomas reach his cell than he took his Bible in his trembling hands, knelt down on the bare floor and said a prayer: "O Lord, if it be Your will that the see go to Etchmiadzin, please give me a sign." Then he closed his eyes, opened the Bible and placed his finger on one of the pages. What he read filled him with joy. It was the first verse of the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Mark. It said: "He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him." That was the sign. "God wants the catholicos to come to his own country," the abbot thought. When, moreover, he found in his mail of that day a letter addressed to all the clergymen of Armenia by four bishops of Cilicia, his conviction became stronger. They were asking for the transfer of the see as soon as possible. The abbot was now considering how he could circulate that letter when, as if by divine providence, a monk came to announce that the monastery had a visitor from Etchmiadzin. The abbot gave the letter to the visitor and begged him to put it in his pocket, to go from monastery to monastery and make its contents known everywhere.

Hovhanness of Hermon himself did not stay inactive. Within a few months all the clergymen of Armenia were alerted. They were all ready and eager to do whatever was necessary to have the see of catholicos return to Etchmiadzin. Even Bishop Zechariah of Al'thamar voiced no objection. It was known, by now, that Catholicos Gregory of Cilicia was not willing to move, and Bishop Zechariah stood a good chance of being elected to the highest post in the Armenian church. It was in the midst of all this stir and excitement that one news item shook the whole Armenian church: the "hand of the Enlightener" had vanished from Cilicia! There was now no reason at all why the see should still be there.

In 1441 a council took place at Val'arshapat in Ancient Armenia where, more than eleven hundred years earlier, Saint Gregory had built the cathedral of Etchmiadzin. Three hundred bishops and vardapets, abbots and priests and other notables

came to participate in the council. Among them were the bishops of the four most important episcopal sees of Armenia. Some other influential clergymen, such as the vardapets of the Province of Taron, had written a letter to say that they agreed with the decisions of the council. The catholicos of Cilicia, Gregory IX, was not present; nor had he sent a letter of protest. He knew about the council, he knew what the council was going to decide, and he seemed not to object. There were many spectators milling about, expressing their joy and telling their dreams.

“In *my* dream,” said a monk, “I went to the tomb of Saint Mesrop in Oshacann, I got a dry branch from there and came and planted it in the middle of the cathedral at Etchmiadzin. It began to grow, it became a tree and there were many fruits among its green leaves . . .”

All the Armenians in and out of the meeting were in a state of hope and joy. The Armenian church was, they felt, at the threshold of a new era, of new vitality. They were all the more happy because Yaghoub Bey, the governor at Yerevan, had welcomed the guests and had gone out of his way to honor them.

“Surely, Zechariah of Havoutstar will get all the votes,” one said. “No, no,” countered another, “I think Hovhanness of Hermon is the right man. He is so learned and he worked so hard!” “My friends,” said another, “you are all mistaken. The person to be elected is the great archbishop of Artaz.” But the speaker himself was mistaken as we now know. The new catholicos was a monk virtually unknown, save to Thomas of Medzop. The latter had foreseen all the contentions and had advised Kiracoss of Virap to be there.

While Kiracoss I was being elevated to the see of catholicos of all Armenians, the “hand of the Enlightener” reappeared in Etchmiadzin. The see was back in its authentic site after 956 years of wanderings.

Introduction to Story XXVII

We saw in our last story that the see of catholicos was transferred from Siss to Etchmiadzin according to the decision of the Council of Val'arshapat held in 1441. This council represented the Armenian people, including the Cilicians. Not even Grigor Moussapekiants himself, the last Cilician catholicos of all Armenians, voiced an objection.

At Etchmiadzin the new catholicos, Kiracoss of Virap, proceeded to use his authority for the correction of certain abuses and to create a spirit of unity among the people. The holy myron (or oil) that he blessed was not sold, as it had been for some time in Cilicia, but distributed freely to the different churches. He removed the ban that had been placed, for reasons of insubordination, on the episcopal see of Al'thamar in the days of Grigor IV. The new catholicos of all Armenians also removed all punitive and restrictive measures that had been taken in a rather indiscriminate and careless manner by the ecclesiastical authorities of Cilicia against certain groups or individuals. He then addressed a copy of his encyclical of blessing to Siss, as to a subject see.

The see of Cilicia had come to an end as a catholicate; the episcopal sees of Ararat and Vaspouracan supported the new catholicos, and there was no effective opposition to the efforts that the latter made toward the betterment of the state of the church. All was quite well for a time, but for a short time only.

The new disturbances originated at the monastery of Tathev. This monastery was the glory of the Province of Sewnik and the fact that the new catholicos came from the Province of Vaspouracan was, for the Tathevites, a cause for discontent. As if to add fuel to the fire, Kiracoss I surrounded himself with Vaspouracanites and entrusted to them the more important functions of the catholicate. As a consequence Tathev became a center of opposition to the reigning catholi-

cos. This condition resulted in his deposition in 1443, under circumstances that are far from fair. Yet Kiracoss seems to have welcomed these developments for he was a man of ascetic tendencies and preferred a quiet life to living in the limelight. He was succeeded on the throne by Grigor X Chalalpekiants, a Tathevite and the former archbishop of Artaz whom we mentioned toward the end of Story XXVI.

It goes without saying that important sections of the Armenian people did not favor the advent of Grigor X to the throne of catholicos in such circumstances. The bishop of Al'thamar went so far as to declare himself Catholicos-Coadjutor while continuing to recognize the deposed Kiracoss of Virap as the only lawful catholicos. This move of the bishop of Al'thamar had two important consequences:

(a) It initiated a procedure whereby each catholicos took an *athorakitz* or coadjutor who shared with him the authority and responsibilities of the office. This procedure had the advantage of satisfying two or more rival parties: when a given party failed to have its own candidate elected, the latter then became a "catholicos-coadjutor". Another advantage was that upon the death of a catholicos his coadjutor automatically succeeded him on the throne and took a new coadjutor in turn, thus avoiding the quarrels that usually accompanied new elections. But the disadvantages of the system outweighed its advantages. The spheres of authority and responsibilities of catholicos and catholicos-coadjutor could never be clearly defined and the confusion reached such proportions that it was nearly impossible at times to distinguish the head from the assistant. Now one church should have one head, and no sooner was this principle tampered with than two—sometimes three—coadjutors were appointed. This system lasted nearly two centuries.

(b) The "catholicos-coadjutor" of Al'thamar soon dropped the word "coadjutor" from his title and became a full "catholicos". The bishop of the Armenians of Albania already used the title of "catholicos". A fourth Armenian catholicos appeared on the scene when a bishop of Siss, Carapet of Eudocia, elevated himself to that office through the support of the sultan of Egypt. Carapet was favoured by the fact that the sultan of Egypt was a rival of Jihanshah, a Turkoman chieftain, whose dominion extended over Armenia proper. As against Carapet, the protege of Jihanshah was Catholicos Grigor X of Etchmiadzin. When Bishop Carapet became a catholicos, it was necessary that he have "the Enlightener's hand" as an external sign of his

apostolic authority. The original "hand" was at Etchmiadzin, therefore Carapet had one made for his own use and is said to have placed in it another relic of Saint Gregory. After many adventures the original "hand" is today at Etchmiadzin, and the one made by Carapet, the founder of the catholicate "of the Great House of Cilicia", is at Antelias, Lebanon. Neither "hand" has ever been opened.

Between the deposition of Kiracoss of Virap and the death of Michael of Sebasteia—one of the men in our story—(1443-1576), ten catholicoi succeeded each other at Etchmiadzin, each new catholico having been the coadjutor of the previous one. As we look at that period from this distance it leaves a melancholy impression. It is a period of stagnation. We do not have even an outstanding historian of the period and our sources of information are often the colophons, that is the short inscriptions in the back of manuscripts copied one from another by different individuals. Yet the hidden vitality of the church is evident in the heroic martyrdom of many Armenians who laid down their lives rather than deny the faith of their fathers.

The stagnation is due to the fact that Armenia in this period was the theater of wars occasioned by the religious differences and political ambitions of Moslem peoples, particularly those between the Persians and the Ottoman Turks. We shall have occasion to speak of the Ottoman empire in the introduction to Story XXIX. As to the Persians, after the defeat of the Sassanian empire by the Arabs, they formed a number of principalities which were invaded by the Seljuks in the eleventh century. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries Persia was invaded again by Mongolian and Turkoman tribes. The new Persian Safavid dynasty was founded in 1499 by Ismael who, while driving out the enemy, occupied a major part of Armenia and Kurdistan. The subsequent wars between the Ottoman Turks and the Persians took place on Armenian territory.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are the periods, in Europe, of the Renaissance and of the Reformation. Armenia was isolated from all these feverish movements but echoes of them are perhaps reflected in the worldly songs which John of Thelcouran, a Cilician catholico (c. 1500), wrote in his youth. Stephen, Michael's predecessor, was exposed to these movements during his European travels. He also went to Poland where, in 1467, Catholicos Khatchatour had consecrated the first bishop of "the Armenian diaspora".

JOURNEY TO EUROPE

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS STEPHEN,
CATHOLICOS MICHAEL AND ABGAR OF EUDOCIA)

In the middle of the sixteenth century the catholicos of all Armenians at Etchmiadzin was Stepan (or Stephen) of Salmast. One of the things Catholicos Stephen liked most was to travel. He had travelled considerably as a young man, having journeyed from Persia to Constantinople with his parents who had decided to migrate to that capital and live there. Stephen had also been to Europe. He liked to study and had learned Latin at a time when not many Armenians knew that language. At Etchmiadzin he had become first an assistant to the catholicos, and then in 1545, Catholicos of All Armenians.

Catholicos Stephen still wanted to travel, but no longer for his personal pleasure. He was concerned with his church and the purpose of the journey that he was now planning to make was to receive help and ideas from abroad.

For over a century the Armenian church had been living as in a prison, and her tribulations were not yet over. She had no contact with the other Christian peoples of the world. Lands which once belonged to the Armenians had been taken either by the Turks or by the Persians. Many were losing their lives because they refused to obey the Moslem judges and did not deny the faith of their fathers. These judges were a calamity to the Armenian people. Under any pretext whatever they would catch an Armenian man or woman and say: "We shall let you go free . . . if you become a Moslem." Because it was customary for the Armenians to remain firm in their faith, killings and burnings were common sights.

The Persians and the Turks were mortal enemies of each other and when they fought, whole towns and villages would be

razed to the ground. There was ruin and desolation everywhere. Who could build a church in such conditions, and who could write a good book? It was nearly impossible to receive an education even for those who were eager to learn.

The Turks and the Persians were suspicious of the Europeans and it was difficult for any man to travel to Europe. But Catholicos Stephen decided to go all the same. He himself did not know exactly what he would be able to accomplish but he trusted in God and hoped for the best. He gave his assistant, Michael of Sebasteia, full authority to govern the church in his absence and set out for Constantinople. The year was 1548.

In that year the Turks had taken from the Persians most of Armenia, including Etchmiadzin. The catholicos believed he could come to an agreement with the Turkish sultan for the protection of the lives and property of his people; he knew that the sultan was himself a friend of the Armenians and eager to secure their help in the realization of his plans. He was certain that the sultan would oblige him by ordering *all* the Turks to be just and friendly toward the Armenians. But upon his arrival in the Turkish capital he learned that the Persians had taken Etchmiadzin back. As one witness of the times puts it: "they left neither villages nor towns, they burned everything, destroyed all the vineyards, and their sword decimated all; they ruined the churches and monasteries and took away many books and Bibles." In profound distress the head of the Armenian church decided to see the pope.

In Rome he obtained from the head of the Roman Catholic church a letter of introduction to the rulers of Europe. Then he went to Germany and had an interview with Emperor Charles V. On the way he had seen the leaders of Venice. From Germany he went to Poland where there was a large Armenian colony. In Poland he saw King Sigismund II. Then, in search of further help for his people he pushed on to the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea. Here too there was a large Armenian colony and, as in Poland, many of the people were quite wealthy.

This was the second time in the history of the Armenian

church that a catholicos was making a tour of what was to be known as the Armenian diaspora, “diaspora” meaning “all the Armenians outside of Armenia”. The first such visit was made by Hovhanness VII in 1485.

Catholicos Stephen returned to Etchmiadzin in 1551 after an absence of three years. He spoke to Assistant-Catholicos Michael with great enthusiasm about all the wonderful things he had seen in Europe. He told him about the beautiful works of Michelangelo, about a new Latin translation of the New Testament from the original Greek, about all the new ideas and great dreams of the people in Italy, in Germany and in Poland. He spoke to him about one Martin Luther who was actively preaching new ideas about the pope and the priests, about the sacraments and the Bible. Above all, Catholicos Stephen was impressed by the speed with which books could now be produced in Europe. Gutenberg had the reputation of having invented the movable types about ninety-five years earlier, and now printing machines with movable types were being used everywhere, particularly in Venice.

Catholicos Michael listened to the report of his colleague with unusual interest and together they took an important decision: they decided to send a messenger to the pope to ask him to help the Armenian church in any way he could. They needed for this purpose a man who could pay his own travelling expenses, who was intelligent and learned enough to give the right information to the right person, and who was willing to make a hazardous journey without fear. Such capable and self-confident men are not easy to find. They were even rarer in the section of Armenia which was under Persian rule, for the Persians were very suspicious and did not wish the Armenians to have any sort of open or secret contacts with the Europeans.

When Catholicos Michael went to Sebasteia sometime before 1562 he hoped he would find the man he was looking for. His wish was fulfilled. He met there a nobleman, Abgar of Eudocia, who was willing to assume the difficult task for the sake of his church. On May 20, 1562 the catholicos gave Abgar a letter of

introduction to the pope: he also gave him presents to take to the head of the Roman Catholic church. Abgar departed, taking with him a priest, Father Alexander, and his own son Dultanshah. He arrived in Rome in 1563.

The pope was then Pius IV. One of the most important councils of the Roman Catholic church, the Council of Trent, which had lasted intermittently for eighteen years, was in its last months of session. Many nations were asking the pope to change certain customs of the Roman Catholic church. These were important matters and the pope had to devote to them the greater part of his time. Yet it is likely that his interest in Abgar was aroused upon hearing that he belonged to a church which from its very beginning had some of the practices that the pope was now being asked to adopt. For example, some nations were asking the pope to have married priests, a practice the Armenian church has always followed. They were also asking him to allow people to receive the holy communion according to a usage which the Armenians had been following all along.

Pius IV knew how to make people feel at home in his presence. He enjoyed friends and liked to dine with them. When the time came for Abgar to have his audience with the pope, he found him attentive and willing to learn about the Armenians and their condition. Abgar gave him the letter of Catholicos Michael and the gifts that he had been carrying with him from place to place for almost a year and a half: a bottle of holy myron, a cross made of solid gold, a ring blessed by the Armenian catholicos, some relics of saints and, even more important than these, a list of all the Armenian communities and monasteries in Asia Minor and Europe. Catholicos Michael's purpose in sending this list was to impress the pope with the importance of the Armenian church. It also meant that the Armenians could reciprocate any help that would be given to them against their oppressors. After a long conversation Abgar summarized the purpose of his visit:

"Your Holiness," he said, "we come here on behalf of our catholicos in order to renew our friendship with your church; we

are eager to know what your position is toward the church of Armenia; we would appreciate any help that you would extend to us against the threats to Christianity in our part of the world; finally, we would like Your Holiness to have a conference with our catholicos. He would be willing to come to Rome." Some days later Abgar presented Pope Pius with a statement of the faith of the Armenian church. He listed in this statement all the differences between the Armenian and the Roman churches, because he wanted the pope to understand that what the Armenians wanted was not to join the Roman church, but to maintain with her friendly relations of mutual help.

Pope Pius IV was satisfied with Abgar's visit and took several measures which benefited the Armenians in a general way, such as ordering the manufacture of Armenian types for use on printing machines, and the appointment of a cardinal to supervise the Armenian affairs. Abgar, however, was not able to return to Armenia for the Persians had heard of his mission and his life was now in danger. He went instead to Venice, printed there several books in Armenian, bought a printing machine and settled for a time in Constantinople.

Abgar's mission did not help the Armenians back home, though this had been his most eager expectation. But when years later he did return to Etchmiadzin, neither he nor Catholicos Michael (who had now become Catholicos of All Armenians) regretted the trip. Many of the books printed by Abgar were now in use. More would be printed and read. The Armenian church was once more on the way to new achievements.

Introduction to Story XXVIII

Our previous story dealt with the interest that Michael of Sebasteia took in the culture of Europe. We have seen that he conceived the bold plan of brightening the future of the Armenian church through the help of European powers. The leaders of the Cilician kingdom had generally counted upon such help, but for a catholicos residing in Armenia proper to do so was something of a novelty.

The efforts of Michael did not bear immediate fruit, for the political destiny of the land was entirely uncertain in the middle of the sixteenth century. It was only the rise to power of one of the better known rulers of history, the Persian Shah Abbas (1587-1628), that gave the Armenians some inkling of the political situation immediately ahead. Shah Abbas made peace with the Turks in 1590, thus bringing to a temporary halt the wars that had been ravaging Armenia for more than a century. But he resumed the hostilities as soon as he felt capable of defeating the Turkish army, and a somewhat longer period of relative peace was not restored until 1620. The agreement of that year left Etchmiadzin on the Persian side of Armenia.

Shah Abbas was the friend of the Armenians in a strange sort of way. He did not hesitate to inflict sufferings upon them in order to force them to contribute their industry and talents to the progress of Persia; then his long and checkered reign was marked by acts of great generosity which were designed to keep the Armenians happy so that they might contribute to the progress of Persia willingly. It was during the reign of Abbas that the Armenian church produced a leader who joined to the strength and purity of his own character the ability to rally the Armenian people around himself and to fire their imagination with his objective which was the restoration of the Armenian church to a position where she would be able to perform her appointed work. This leader was Moses of Tathev. He combined in his person the virtues of a saint and an administrator.

Moses became Catholicos of All Armenians in 1629 when he had already accomplished most of his work. When he died in 1632 he had reigned less than three years. At this time the previous catholicos, David IV of Val'arshapat, was still alive in the city of Isfahan. But he was in his nineties, and his body and his mind no longer served him well. Between Michael of Sebasteia and David IV the throne of catholicos had been occupied by Grigor XII of Val'arshapat (1576-1590).

The following events that took place during the reigns of Grigor, David and Moses affected more or less directly the destiny of the Armenian church then and later:

In Rome an "Armenian Seminary" was planned, but not realized by Pope Gregory XIII. This pope was anxious to correct "errors [that] had found their way into the Armenian church". He wrote an encyclical to this effect in 1585 in which he otherwise praises the Armenians. In 1630 Pope Urban VIII founded a school of Catholic propaganda where Armenian students were admitted.

We saw previously that after the downfall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia a large Armenian population had remained, and Carapet of Eudocia had established a catholicate in that part of Asia Minor. In the second half of the sixteenth century the situation of these Armenians had become intolerable due to the constant wars waged by the Ottoman empire of which they were but second-class citizens. High taxes were levied and any pretext was used to try to force individual Armenians to give up their faith. The Cilician Armenians begged the pope to use his influence with the sultan for fairer treatment. It goes without saying that the pope exploited the possibilities thus offered for making more converts, but he had little success. Nearly three decades later the Carmelites fared better in Poland where they won to their side Nicol Thorossowitch, an Armenian bishop, who carried his congregation with him into the Latin church. Nicol's move, which would not have been possible without the active support of the Polish authorities, weakened the Armenian church considerably in that country. It must also be said that Nicol was consecrated against the will of the Polish Armenians who "almost killed him and the catholicos who consecrated him." "The catholicos who consecrated him" was Catholicos-Coadjutor Melchizedek, and the consecration of Nicol is far from being his only destructive exploit. Melchizedek's life and works are a sad commentary on the

condition of the church in his time. Perhaps the only occasion on which he deserves our sympathy is that of his punishment by Shah Abbas who condemned him to eat his own flesh which the shah's soldiers yanked off his arm, placed in his mouth and forced him to swallow. The punishment was due to three offenses which the shah, a former friend of his, regarded as particularly odious: he had sold relics and pawned treasures belonging to Etchmiadzin; he had functioned as catholicos in Isfahan without the shah's permission; and, also without the shah's permission, he had returned to Yerevan during a forced emigration to Persia of all the Armenians of southern Armenia.

The forced emigration had taken place by order of Shah Abbas. It is a tale of horror and cruelty, but once within the borders of Persia, the Armenians were the object of the shah's favourable attention. His self-interest led him to build for them the city of Nor ("new") Tchougha in order to enable them to forget the Tchougha that they had been forced to abandon. In order to make them feel "at home" he brought from Etchmiadzin fifteen of the most important stones of the Mother Cathedral (ruining that cathedral in the process) and these he eventually placed in an Armenian church in their new town. He also brought from Etchmiadzin "the Enlightener's hand." The "hand" returned to Etchmiadzin from this, its last, exile in 1638.

While some of the Persian-Armenian communities prospered, famine spread in Armenia; bandits known as the Jellali kept plundering an already famine-stricken land. Yet even against a background of loose morals in high places, persecutions, forced conversions to Islam, high taxes, famine and wars, individual Armenians, whether wealthy or poor, were capable of uncommon heroism. On one occasion a simple priest, Father Balthazar, was so firm in the faith that he withstood Abbas' bloodiest threats until the shah marvelled at his daring and allowed him and his followers to keep their religion and to go free of debts. Not all those who clung to their faith with equal tenacity were equally lucky.

The greatest monuments to the vitality of the Armenian church in the period under consideration are the monastery at Tathev and that of Armash (Turkey). The latter functioned intermittently until the beginning of this century and has produced some of the finest clergymen of the Armenian church.

A RENEWED LIFE FOR THE CHURCH

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS MOSES OF TATHEV)

The Turks entered Armenia for the first time in 1473 after defeating the armed forces of a warrior known as Hassan the Tall who was the chief of a number of tribes known as "the tribes of the white sheep." Twenty-six years later a grandson of Hassan, Ismail by name, reorganized the Persian tribes and founded the dynasty of the Safavid. The story of this dynasty is a story of almost uninterrupted warfare with the Turks for a period of over two hundred years. All these wars took place on Armenian territory, and this was not the only way in which they ravaged Armenia.

The monarchs both of Persia and of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire needed of course large sums of money for their own personal pleasures and for the needs of their lands. A good portion of this money was taken from the Christians living in these lands, including the Armenians, and there were no fixed laws as to the amount and manner of collection of the taxes. It all depended upon the Turkish sultan or the Persian shah, and because these chiefs of state often lived far away, the person who generally decided these matters was the local Turkish or Persian official. Both the Turks and the Persians were Moslems, but they belonged to two different sects and were mortal enemies of each other. They commonly believed however that the religious head of a community was also its secular head. Thus they held the catholicos responsible for the sums to be collected from the Armenian people and sometimes lent their assistance when people had to be *forced* to pay. There was too much preoccupation with money all around and there were many abuses.

Catholicos David IV and his coadjutor or assistant, Melchizedek, never had money enough to pay the government all they

owed and meet their own needs besides. They therefore thought, in 1603, of taking on another assistant who would himself be a man of means and otherwise help them increase the revenues of the catholicate. The choice of the notables of the people fell on Serapion of Ourha (or Edessa). Serapion was an honest person who spoke his mind without fear. He wanted to work honestly with honest people, without seeking personal advantage. He could not succeed. He suffered instead many hardships and when he died in Diarbekir, the city of which he was the bishop, he was a disappointed man. He would surely have been happier in the last days of his life had he known that one of his students was going to achieve what he himself could not. This student is Moses of Tathev. He is one of the most honored clergymen of the Armenian church.

Moses of Tathev was born sometime between 1580 and 1585 in a small village of the province of Sewnik. In 1600, when he was already a priest, he had come to the Armenian monastery of Jerusalem and while continuing his studies he had learned an art which was going to help him very much at a very critical time: he had learned the art, unknown in Persia at the time, of making *white* candles. Yet Moses had paid much more attention to the teachings and ritual of the Armenian church than to making candles. The Armenian monastery of Jerusalem was the only Armenian church center of that period where one could study quietly and learn from good masters. One of his good masters had been Grigor of Caesarea, Patriarch of Constantinople; during his reign the fame of Moses had spread throughout Armenia. The patriarch had even been asked to elevate Moses to the rank of vardapet.

Moses Vardapet came into close contact with the people and clergymen of the Armenian church when he accompanied Grigor of Caesarea on a tour to raise money for the monastery of Jerusalem. They travelled to Syria and Egypt; they also visited the many Armenian communities between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. The young vardapet preached on many occasions and people who had never heard sermons such as his came in

multitudes to hear him. His message was timely and simple to understand: too many abuses have crept into the Armenian church, he said, and people seem to have forgotten that the first duty of a Christian is not to seek wealth and pleasures, but to work for the welfare of others. He urged the people to live lives that would be pleasing to God. He related again and again the story of Jesus' chasing the money-changers out of the Temple. Most people had been having feelings and thoughts like those of Moses of Tathev for a long time; and now they were glad to see a man of courage who declared from the pulpits what they felt in their hearts. He said it well and with authority. People loved him and his fame preceded him to the towns and villages that the patriarch and he visited. When Grigor went to Caesarea, Moses decided to go to Tathev. Great new ideas were turning in his head day and night.

At that time the ruler of Persia was Shah Abbas, the most famous king of the Safavid dynasty. He once became very angry at the custom that the Armenians had, then, of tonsuring young choristers. One Armenian priest had already been a victim of his senseless anger when the shah asked to know the man responsible for *starting* that custom.

"Two Armenians, Moses and Paul'os are responsible for starting the custom of shaving the tops of these young people's heads," said the jealous and ignorant officials of the shah. Presently the shah ordered the immediate arrest of the two vardapets who were brought into his presence yoked together like a pair of oxen, with chains on their feet. After a mock trial the innocent vardapets were heavily fined, even though they did not have any money at all; but the people showed their love and respect for them by raising within a few days more than twice the amount of the fine imposed upon their beloved vardapets. They were freed and the extra money was used for the liberation of many other prisoners.

Moses of Tathev and Paul'os of Moc spent most of their time on the road; they would stop wherever they saw a crowd. They would preach the word of God and would invite the people to

keep faithfully the commandments of God. But every so often they would feel the need of rest, of new learning, of meditation. They would then go to Tathev where a monastery known as "Medz-Anapat" had been recently re-established by two saintly clergymen: Sarkis Paronter, a bishop, and Kiracoss of Pontus, a priest.

The monastery of Medz-Anapat was in Armenia like a diamond shining on a heap of rubbles. Under foreign rule, the country was full of greedy people, and sinful actions could be seen everywhere. But when one came to Medz-Anapat, it was like being in a different world. Here the monks lived very austere lives: they owned absolutely nothing; they never ate meat and never drank wine for pleasure; they obeyed the abbot without asking any questions; they ate together in silence while listening to a reading of the writings of the church fathers; they confessed to each other any deviation from a saintly life. Besides all these austerities some monks had "secret virtues," that is, acts of charity such as waiting on the sick, which they performed in addition to their regular duties. It is for this monastery that Moses and Paul'os worked and they returned to it again and again as weary harts return to a familiar brook to quench their thirst.

Eventually Moses went to Yerevan and there he established the monastery of Saint Ananias on the model of the monastery of Medz-Anapat. Because of his sterling character and good influence on people he had won the respect of the Persian governor of Yerevan and there he was consecrated a bishop on April 7, 1623.

One day Bayendur, an envoy of Shah Abbas, came with Governor Amirkule of Yerevan, to visit Bishop Moses. The courteous bishop presented each of his guests with seven white candles.

"I have never seen white candles before in my life," said Bayendur, "I will take them to His Majesty the Shah and tell him what an Armenian bishop can do." Upon hearing this remark Amirkule gave *his* candles to the royal envoy. Bishop Moses added seven more, and all twenty-one candles were taken

to Shah Abbas. Moses was quickly called to Isfahan to teach the Persians the art of making white candles. The historian tells us that these candles filled the shah with joy. He would take them in his hands and play with them like a child. In order to show his appreciation he arranged that Bishop Moses celebrate the Divine Liturgy on a Sunday when he, the shah, was free. He attended the services even though he was a Moslem. He was so impressed with the person of the bishop that he wanted to shower him with gifts, but the bishop would accept nothing. Before the latter returned to Yerevan the shah made a proclamation to the effect that Bishop Moses was to become the sacristan of Holy Etchmiadzin.

In 1627 the cathedral of Etchmiadzin was in a sorry state. It had not been used for two or three decades. The floors were torn, the altar was ruined and birds had built nests in holes in the walls. The only sign of life was a lamp of oil resting on what was once the altar, and that lamp was periodically refurbished and lit by a devout Moslem. The courtyard was full of fallen stones. One of the important achievements of Moses of Tathev is the rebuilding of the cathedral of Etchmiadzin. The extensive repairs were completed toward the end of the year 1628. At about this time Shah Abbas died.

To congratulate Shah Safi, the new king of Persia, the notable Armenians of Persia, led by the wealthy Khodja Nazar, presented him with a trayful of gold. They asked the new shah to proclaim Moses of Tathev Catholicos of All Armenians. Their wish was granted. By the offer of additional gifts the Armenians succeeded in persuading the shah to cancel all the debts that Etchmiadzin owed to the Persian crown; cancelled too was the obligation of the catholicos to pay an annual tribute.

Catholicos Moses III did not live long; but the order and regularity that he introduced both in the accounts of the catholicate and in the services of the church, as well as the holiness, learning and discipline that he required of all his clergymen signified the beginning of a renewed spiritual life in Armenia. Catholicos Moses died on May 14, 1632.

Introduction to Story XXIX

We said a word about the origins of the Ottoman empire in our introduction to Story XXVI. Perhaps the most important date in the history of that empire is May 29, 1453, when Mohammed II Fatih ("the Conqueror") took Constantinople and thus gave the *coup de grace* to the dying Byzantine empire. Up to that time the Christian inhabitants of the capital had been under the nominal jurisdiction of the Greek patriarch of Constantinople, even though an Armenian church is said to have been built there around 1360. Another Armenian church was built in 1436 in Galata, a section of Constantinople.

The chief problem with which the Turkish sultan was faced after the great conquest was the creation of a *modus vivendi* with the large Christian communities of the land. As we have seen in Story XVIII, the Moslems defined a community in terms of its religion. Since they themselves were governed according to the tenets of their religion, they had to allow the other religious groups of their empire to be internally governed according to *theirs*. Mohammed II allowed the Greeks to keep their patriarchate and caused Bishop Hovakim to come from Brusa to become the first patriarch of the Armenians of Constantinople in 1461.

The historical repercussions of the step taken by Mohammed II are many and its importance in the destiny of the Armenians cannot be exaggerated. The Ottoman sultans reserved the right of placing on the patriarchal see a person of their choice and saw to it that the Armenians, along with other non-Moslem communities, contributed as much as possible to the military and economic needs of the empire. The sultans were not concerned with the internal affairs of these communities and left to the patriarch such cares as the education of his people, the institution of communal laws governing inheritance, the issuance of birth (or baptismal) and marriage certificates,

works of charity within the community, the settlement of family disputes and the like. The decisions of the patriarch were implemented by the Turkish militia and thus his power over the people of his community was, theoretically at least, second only to that of the sultan.

Now where there is power there is abuse and in the later, generally corrupt, atmosphere of the Ottoman capital neither the Greek nor the Armenian patriarchate was itself free of corruption. By the second half of the seventeenth century any clever person of means could buy his appointment to the see of patriarch and then exploit its many financial possibilities. In 1679, a civilian contractor, Sargs by name, used his connections in the palace to obtain a *firman* proclaiming him the patriarch of the Armenians. He was ordained a priest and occupied the see while keeping his lucrative job of providing bread to the Turkish army. It is to this state of affairs that Hovhanness Colot put an end.

One of the false charges brought against Patriarch Hovhanness was that he allowed Latin teachings to be disseminated among the Armenians. The charge is groundless but it reflects the problems with which the patriarchate of Constantinople was concerned during the major part of its existence. The one relentless struggle that was carried on within the Armenian community until the second quarter of the nineteenth century was that between the latinizing Armenians and those who wished to remain faithful to their authentic tradition. The first two decades of the seventeenth century are particularly marked by this struggle. The leader of the latinizing party was then Bishop John the Deaf (Hovhanness Khoul); he occupied the see in 1600 and was promptly taken down. He made another attempt in 1609 and succeeded in occupying the throne again but only for a short time. The same process repeated itself in 1613. He could not hold the office for he had against him a formidable opponent in the person of Grigor of Caesarea whom we mentioned in our last story in connection with Moses of Tathev.

The pope was keenly aware of the struggle going on within the Armenian community of Constantinople and the supply of Armenian-speaking Latin missionaries was never short in the city. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century Clemente Galano da Sorrento, a Latin missionary, spent four years in Etchmiadzin learning Armenian; he then came to Constantinople, ingratiated himself with the

Armenians through his medical services while wearing the garb of an Armenian vardapet. The Armenian patriarch was tolerant enough not to prevent a vardapet from preaching, even when his latinizing tendencies were known. But this is not a typical reaction to Catholic propaganda, and sometimes morally dubious or bad means were good enough if they led to the end of repressing Catholicism.

The Latins were regarded by the Ottoman government as agents of European powers, particularly of France. And the fact was that the French embassy and the Jesuit as well as other monks used each others' support and services for the furtherance of their mutual objectives. The Ottoman government would not allow the Latins to have a patriarchate of their own (or its equivalent) in the empire; and the Armenians who attended Latin churches were looked upon unfavourably. This placed the Latin missionaries in a difficult predicament. There was in effect no church which Armenian Roman Catholics could freely attend. Patriarch Avetik was among those who resisted Latin pressure in the beginning of the eighteenth century. In so doing he invited upon himself the personal enmity of the French ambassador, Charles Ferriol, Marquis d'Argental. With the help of a Jesuit priest the ambassador had Avetik kidnapped during the latter's voyage to Jerusalem. Robbed, tortured and chained, Avetik was dragged in top secrecy from prison to prison until, by order of Louis XIV, he was sent to the Bastille. There he was duly brainwashed and made to accept the Latin faith.

Avetik had been the patriarch of Constantinople from 1702 to 1703 and again from 1704 to 1706. During his first tenure he had taken the decision of uniting the patriarchates of Constantinople and of Jerusalem, a measure which contributed to the sad deterioration of both sees.

All the blame for the difficulties of the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople must not be placed on the latinophile party. The members of this party were at times subjected to persecution, and motives of personal vindictiveness were at play. Furthermore, some members of the latinizing school were sincerely convinced that they were serving the spiritual interests of the Armenian community by trying to bring the Armenian church under the papacy. Mekhitar of Sebasteia was one such man. He founded early in the 18th century the order of the Mekhitarists which has rendered appreciable cultural services to the Armenian people.

A GREAT PATRIARCH
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

(THE STORY OF HOVHANNESS COLOT)

The ancient province of Taron, in Armenia, came to be known in later centuries as Moush. The principal city of this province had that same name and it was famous for its exceptionally brave men and women. But Moush would never have held in the hearts of many Armenians the warm place that it does had it not been associated with the monastery of Saint Carapet. One could walk from Moush to the monastery of Saint Carapet, at the village of Glac, in the course of a single day, and it was a rugged journey. Rugged, but pleasant. Particularly pleasant for children was the crossing of the river Aradzani on barges and boats skillfully rowed by strong men. Thousands of Armenians followed that road every year, hope swelling their breasts, for they were sure that Saint Carapet would not refuse to intercede with God in heaven for the fulfillment of their fervent prayers. The word *carapet* (or *garabed*) in Armenian means "one who opens the way" and so Carapet was another name for John the Baptist. The pilgrims to the monastery of Saint Carapet hoped that God would be kind to them as he had been kind to Zacharias, the Baptist's father.

One day in the early years of the eighteenth century two monks came to the monastery of the village of Glac and expressed to the abbot their wish to become members of that institution. One of them was small in size and had an eager and intelligent face. He gave his name as Hovhanness. He was born, he said, at the village of Bal'esh. His friend Grigor was somewhat taller. As the abbot looked at him he was under the impression that he had never seen a kinder person nor one more determined. Hovhanness and Grigor became monks of Saint Carapet's Monastery of Moush and before long won everyone's

respect and friendship. They were serious in their studies and when they prayed it was as if they did not belong to this world. They worked hard for a single objective: to make the Armenian church as pleasing to God as possible. Then in the year 1709 the world seemed to fall apart. An earthquake shook the province and most of the buildings of the monastery came crumbling to the ground.

There was only one thing to do: rebuild. But the people of Moush were poor and so were many of the Armenians of the nearby provinces. It was necessary to approach those who lived at the capital of the Ottoman empire: *there* were the high Armenian officials of the palace, the successful businessmen. The envoy who would go about raising money should be a convincing preacher and should endear himself to others through the sanctity of his life; a quiet devotion to his church should emanate from his person so that others might be touched by it. The one person at the monastery who was eminently qualified for this work was Hovhanness Vardapet. One morning in 1712 he bade goodbye to the brothers and bid them pray for him and for his work; he said a short prayer, made the sign of the cross and left for his long and uncertain journey. When, after about a year, he arrived in the imposing city of Constantinople, he had already sent to Glac enough money which, contrary to his expectations, he had been able to raise along the way. The brothers back home were already living in fairly decent conditions. Father Hovhanness remembered with particular warmth his friend Grigor who was now the abbot. "The money I have sent will be used honestly and wisely," he thought.

As soon as the itinerant vardapet arrived in Constantinople he went to the residence of the Armenian patriarch at Kumkapi. He had a long conversation with Patriarch Sahac of Aputchekh, and what he heard did not make him happy.

"Debts!" the patriarch said. "We are crushed under debts. They have piled up in the course of years, and we just do not know how to pay them. Yes, mismanagement, irresponsibility. And nowadays, alas, it is so easy to become a patriarch! All one

has to do is to obtain an edict from the sultan and then one occupies the see, and is always tempted to use the advantages of the office for one's own self. I am thinking not so much of Constantinople as of our monastery at Jerusalem. You know that for some years now the patriarchates of Constantinople and of Jerusalem have been united; so I am also the patriarch of Jerusalem, but most of the time I do not even know what is going on there. There are reports even of dishonesty. We are so far away, and trustworthy people are so hard to find . . .”

The young vardapet was listening with keen interest. The patriarch went on:

“And the Latins!” he said. “The Latins are our second major problem. A good many have already been attracted to their teachings. They are feverishly engaged in trying to convert more of our own people, and they won't rest until they take over the entire patriarchate. Oh, don't look so shocked. That is exactly what the Latins are trying to do. There are rumors that the French ambassador—who, by the way, always works with the abbots of the Latin monasteries—has kidnapped Avetik, our predecessor, and sent him to his death. That was the former ambassador. You may have heard of him: Ferriol. Of course the Latins have not succeeded so far; I always say they never will. And yet, if our debts mount and if we cannot pay them, and if our churches, houses and farms are confiscated, and if . . .”

“No, no, Reverend Father, we must not talk that way,” said Hovhanness Vardapet. “There is no reason why all these catastrophes *should* happen. We must get to work at once. Someone ought to go to Jerusalem and clear up this confusion. I know that an honest man who goes there will probably not be welcome at this time, but he *will* be helping the church. If we do our best, God will help us.”

The suggestion of Hovhanness was a good one. Some days later the patriarch and the notables of the town put their heads together to decide on a competent envoy to Jerusalem. They decided that Glac was too small a place for Hovhanness and that a man of his competence and dedication should work in a

larger area and hold a position of much higher responsibility. He should go to Jerusalem, they thought. They raised some money in Constantinople and gave it to him so that he could pay some of the debts upon his arrival there.

The young vardapet arrived in Jerusalem like a breeze which blows into a house on a hot, oppressive day. Immediately he paid some of the debts and saved some of the real estate and treasures of the Armenian monastery that had been placed as securities at the disposition of creditors. The year was 1713. Easter was not too far off. Father Hovhanness expected many pilgrims from Constantinople; with their gifts he would be able to save more, and soon the monastery would be able to function normally. Before long his hopes were dashed to the ground. Patriarch Sahac had resigned in Constantinople. His successor sent a representative to Jerusalem who proved to be "a second Bel, an unquenchable doer of evil". The pilgrims were shipwrecked and had to return to Constantinople. Hovhanness waited another year. Again the pilgrims' ship was damaged in a storm. Hopelessness was rife. The situation was becoming worse every day. It could have broken an ordinary man's spirit. Hovhanness Vardapet was not an ordinary person. In a fit of righteous anger he broke one day the seal of the monastery so that no one might use it to contract new debts. He asked the creditors to wait four more years, assumed personal responsibility for payment and returned to Constantinople for a new fund-raising campaign. He was determined not to let Armenian possessions in Jerusalem go, not only because they were valuable in themselves but because he wanted the Armenian church to keep her footing in the town where "God had walked".

Hovhanness Vardapet returned to Constantinople with a new program. "We must," he said, "we absolutely must separate the patriarchate of Jerusalem from that of Constantinople, and each must have its own patriarch again." The two sees had been united for fourteen years and it had not worked. The Armenian notables of Constantinople agreed to the new proposal:

"You become *our* patriarch," they said, "and we shall con-

sider your suggestion for the see of Jerusalem. In fact," they agreed, "the man of your choice will become the patriarch of Jerusalem and we shall help both of you reduce the debts."

Hovhanness Vardapet was not eager to become a patriarch, but he accepted the responsibility. The year was 1715. He was now thirty-seven years old. Hovhanness of Gantzac, the then reigning head of the church at Constantinople, willingly relinquished the see to an abler man. At the Divine Liturgy on the following Sunday the people were astonished to hear that their patriarch no longer had under his jurisdiction Jerusalem as well. Jerusalem had a patriarch of its own again. "May God help them both," the people commented as they came out of the churches.

Patriarch Hovhanness of Constantinople now turned his attention to the people under his own jurisdiction. New churches should be built, schools opened, books written or translated and printed, a way should be found of living peaceably with the Latins. Gradually all these things were being accomplished. A new era had dawned, an era of tolerance and progress.

For a little less than three centuries the patriarchate of Constantinople had been the third most important see of the Armenian church. The opinion of the Armenians of this capital mattered a great deal in the matter of the election of the catholicos himself. In fact, on February 27, 1726 the catholicos of all Armenians, Carapet II, was anointed in Constantinople. At the time Yerevan and Etchmiadzin were under Ottoman rule and the catholicos had to be approved by the sultan. Carapet's being anointed catholicos at Constantinople was therefore very convenient, since the sultan himself resided there. Hovhanness Vardapet became a bishop in that same year, on the second day of March.

Hovhanness "Colot" (as he is known to history because of his small size) had a glorious reign of twenty-six years. He was the greatest of the Armenian patriarchs of Constantinople since the establishment of that see in 1461.

Introduction to Story XXX

From a religious point of view the world's most important city is Jerusalem. It is the holy city of all Jews and Christians; as for the Moslems, it is their third most holy city after Mecca and Medina. Its origins go back to the Stone Age. It was known as Urusalim ("burg of safety") when it was a mere hill-fort and an outpost for the pharaohs of Egypt. H.M.J. Loewe, a scholar of Rabbinic literature, summarizes the long history of Jerusalem as follows:

"In her thirty-three centuries of history she has suffered at the hands of nature and of man. She has been rocked by earthquakes and sacked by invaders. She has endured over twenty sieges and blockades, about eighteen reconstructions and two periods of desolation, after Nebuchadrezzar and Hadrian, when history is silent: six times has she passed from one religion to another. Her valleys have been filled and her hills levelled, her streets and buildings destroyed and her people slain and exiled. But Jerusalem has remained. Her spirit is eternal." It is probable that there were Armenians in Jerusalem during most of this period; they went there in appreciable numbers in the time of Tigran the Great, and many of them were there during the ministry of Jesus.

According to Clement, a Greek Christian father who died in 220, James, "the brother of the Lord" (Mt. XIII:55), was the first "bishop of bishops" of Jerusalem. And Eusebius who is known as "the father of church history" and who died in 349 tells us that in his day the episcopal see of James could still be seen. Now the Armenian monastery and basilica of Jerusalem are named after two Jameses. One of these is "the brother of the Lord" just mentioned. The basilica is reputed to occupy the site where his house was. The other James after whom the basilica and monastery are named is the son of Zebedee and the brother of John the Evangelist. Both brothers were the apostles of Christ. The Armenian basilica of Jerusalem

contains a skull which is, according to a persistent tradition, that of James the son of Zebedee who was martyred at the hands of Herod Agrippa (Acts XII:2).

The Greeks place the death of Saint James, "the brother of the Lord", in 62 A.D. Then after a succession of thirty-four bishops of Jerusalem they come to Macarius I who is said to have reigned from 324 to 333. These must have been the bishops also of the Armenians living in Jerusalem, and the same is to be said of the successors of Macarius up to the second half of the fifth century at which time the Armenians and the Greeks could no longer frequent the same churches due to the acceptance, by the Greeks, of the novel decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. Although we have no record of separate Armenian bishops in Jerusalem during that time and until the middle of the seventh century, we may suppose that the Armenians formed communities of their own and waited for the opportunity to present itself to free themselves from Greek jurisdiction.

That opportunity came with the conquest of Jerusalem by Omar (d. 644), a successor of Muhammed, the Prophet of Islam. Omar took account of the religious differences between the Armenians and the Greeks and created a separate bishopric under the Armenian bishop, Abraham, whose tenure lasted from 638 to 669.

Abraham is said to have made a journey to Mecca even before the death of Muhammed, to obtain from the Prophet himself a decree to the effect that certain shrines in Jerusalem belong to the Armenians. The center of the Armenian community was then and is still situated on the western heights of Mount Zion.

The monastery had a period of prosperity during the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, for the kings, princes and nobles of that land came on pilgrimages with handsome gifts; but had the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem continued much longer, the Armenians would probably have lost every piece of property they own in that city. Instead, Sultan Saladin of Egypt (1174-93) strengthened the position of the Armenians in the Holy Land and in 1311 Bishop Sargis appealed to Sultan Nasser-Muhammed to be recognized as the autocephalous patriarch of the Armenians. Although the title "patriarch" had been given by the Arabs to previous Armenian bishops, Sargis is the first one to have used it for himself in Christian circles. The use of this title had two implications: a) Sargis was opposed to the latinizing tendencies that were gaining momentum in Siss; b) he was

determined, with the help of Arab authorities, to be a bulwark against Greek and Latin encroachments upon the rights and privileges of the Armenians in the Holy Land.

The Armenian patriarchate of Jerusalem is the second most important see of the Armenian church. It is, from an international point of view, of unsurpassed value, since it is a partner in the ownership and use of the Christian holy places, together with the Greek and Latin patriarchates, and these rights extend to Bethlehem as well. The Armenian patriarch is legally the religious head also of the Ethiopian, Coptic and Syrian communities of Jerusalem. The Armenian rights and privileges have been established and/or recognized by the aforementioned firmans or decrees. A particularly important firman is the one issued in 1521 by Sultan Suleyman I "Kanuni" which states that "noble pious doctors ("ulemas"), judges and all and sundry servants of the Porte (i.e. the Crown) and others whoever they may be, may not for any reason or cause whatever either oppose, hinder, dispute, interfere with or intervene in, alter or change the rights (of the communities and their patriarchs)". This decree along with the one issued by Sultan Selim "Yavouz" in 1570 was held as a basis for subsequent firmans. Another very important firman was obtained in 1813 in most dramatic circumstances, when the Greeks had, once more, fashioned false documents to dispossess the Armenians. On that occasion the wealthy opened their purses with unprecedented generosity and all elements of the nation united to save the Armenian holy places in Jerusalem. The last decree was issued to Patriarch Cyril Israeliian, in 1945, by the king of England. At the present time the patriarch of Jerusalem must be approved by the king of Jordan. The British mandate came to an end in 1948.

Until 1918 the Armenian patriarchate of Jerusalem was administratively subordinate to the patriarchate of Constantinople. An end was definitively put to this situation in 1930, when the patriarchate of Jerusalem adopted a constitution of its own which made the patriarch and the General Assembly of the Brotherhood independent of any other ecclesiastical see. The supremacy of the catholicos of all Armenians is recognized in spiritualities and he (the catholicos) consecrates the bishops of the Brotherhood. Under normal circumstances the patriarchate serves the nation by safeguarding the important holy places under its care and jurisdiction; through its theological and lay schools; its publications, library and other such services.

ORDER IS RESTORED

(THE STORY OF GRIGOR THE CHAIN BEARER)

On September 9, 1715 the Armenian people of Constantinople went to church because it was the Saturday preceding the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and they expected the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated as usual. The Liturgy itself proceeded according to usage, but in the prayer called "Special Intercessions" the deacon intoned names that were entirely new: "... and to the chief bishop and venerable Patriarch of Jerusalem, lord Grigor, and to our chief bishop and venerable Patriarch of Constantinople, lord Hovhanness . . ."

A great many among the congregation were baffled. Who was lord Grigor? Since when had Hovhanness Vardapet become their patriarch? Why was the patriarch of Jerusalem mentioned *first*? Why was he mentioned at all? It did not take long to find out.

Hovhaness Vardapet was a capable clergyman from the monastery of Saint Carapet of Moush, and had lived in Jerusalem for several years. There he had come to the conclusion that the system recently adopted of having *one* patriarch for the Armenians of both Constantinople and Jerusalem was not a good one. He had asked the influential people of Constantinople to have one patriarch for themselves and another for Jerusalem. Then on the insistent request of his friends he himself had become the patriarch of the capital of the Ottoman empire, and his friends had promptly accepted his proposal that Grigor of Shirwan, his closest friend and the then abbot of the monastery of Saint Carapet, become the patriarch of the Holy City.

The patriarchate of Jerusalem is an apostolic see; that is to say, the patriarch of that city continues to reside where the apostles have resided. In fact, the Armenian monastery is situated at the place where Saint James had his house and was later buried. Saint James was the first head of the church at Jerusalem after the Ascension of Jesus Christ. Beneath the Armenian cathedral of Jerusalem is buried the head of the other Saint James: the brother of Saint John who wrote the fourth gospel.

The Armenian patriarch and the clergy under his orders watch and care for many places in Palestine which are connected with the life of Jesus. Armenian monks have done this since the days of Saint Gregory the Enlightener. Some of the holy places are owned by the Armenians; of others they have the custody. For example, they own the Church of the Holy Saviour built at the place where Jesus was tried on Holy Thursday; along with the Greeks and the Latins the Armenians have the custody of the Holy Sepulchre in the Church of the Ressurrection, over which the Armenian Divine Liturgy is celebrated every day except Good Friday. No shrine is more venerated by the Christians of the whole world. All the other holy places of Palestine are almost equally important and the Armenians have kept their rights and privileges over them with great vigilance and often at the cost of their lives. Millions of pilgrims have yearly visited these holy places through the centuries.

The pilgrims used to go to Jerusalem, to Bethlehem and to other places in Palestine bearing gifts; thus the wealth of the city and of its various residents increased each year, and where there is wealth there is jealousy and corruption. The Greeks and then the Latins tried to take away from the Armenians their holy places: money had therefore to be spent in order to reclaim them. Some people who had been in charge of the Armenian monastery wanted only one thing: to get rich. They proceeded to become rich by any and all means. There was no money left in the treasury; yet there were expenses and money had to be borrowed. Many of the olive orchards, vine-

yards and other possessions of the monastery, many of its most precious objects were placed as securities with the creditors. The debts kept mounting, mounting. The historian tells us that sometimes while the Divine Liturgy was being celebrated a creditor would come, grab the golden chalice from the hands of the priest and walk away.

This was the situation in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Grigor of Shirwan received orders from the catholicos of all Armenians to assume the responsibility and dignity of Patriarch of Jerusalem. He had hesitated for a time after receiving the invitation of Hovhanness, but everyone knew, except himself, that *he* was the man of the hour.

Patriarch Hovhanness had been waiting for Grigor for a long time. When the latter arrived in 1717, on the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, tears of joy flooded his eyes on seeing his friend. "O thou who art to place a crown on the holy places," said the patriarch of Constantinople to the patriarch of Jerusalem, "thou humbledst thyself and camest; I would gladly kiss the earth and ashes of the road that thou didst follow . . ."

Grigor of Shirwan thought of the prophets of the Old Testament. In order to convey a message the prophets used to *show* it to the people as when Jeremiah wore a yoke in order to show the Jews that they had to submit to the Chaldeans. Grigor wanted to show to the Armenians of Constantinople that their monastery of Jerusalem had been the slave of vices and debts. The symbol of slavery is the chain. Grigor took a chain of iron, put it around his own neck and locked it tightly under his chin. Then he took a solemn vow:

"I make a vow in the presence of God," he said, "that I will not take this chain off my neck until such time when, with His help, the suffering Armenians will have received consolation, eyes will have stopped weeping, disgrace will have been removed from our nation and we shall be unburdened of our debts which are as huge as the sea and as high as the mountain."

Grigor the Chain bearer (as he is known to history) then

began to work toward his first objective: he made the multitudes aware of the dangers that were threatening the Armenian monastery of the Holy City and their holy places in it. He wrote one letter after another, went from one house to the next and from church to church. He would preach the sermon and at the end of the service he would stand at the door of the church, the chain wet with perspiration. Before long his voice became the most familiar one among the Armenians of the city.

“Have mercy, have mercy upon me, ye believers in Christ,” he would say, “for my house is placed as security against my debts and my children have deserted me and I am about to be sold as a slave . . . have mercy upon me.”

No heart with any measure of pity in it could resist the plea. People high and low, rich and poor, opened their purses. The chain-bearing patriarch had seen to it that corrupt officials be removed from positions of responsibility in Jerusalem. The news of the monastery’s recovery reached all parts of the Ottoman empire and of Persia. Help came from the most unexpected places. The catholicos of all Armenians stopped all other campaigns. The whole nation was in travail to pay off all its debts in Jerusalem within the shortest possible time. Then a terrible thing happened.

On July 5, 1718, at midnight, a fire that could not be put out for thirty-four long hours razed to the ground one half of the city of Constantinople. The Armenian cathedral, the patriarchate, many of the houses of the wealthiest people were utterly destroyed. People began to attend to their own misfortunes, to their dead and maimed, and Jerusalem was forgotten.

But to both Hovhanness and Grigor misfortune was only a challenge. They now revealed a new aspect of their character. They rolled up their sleeves and began to work as ordinary laborers to rebuild the cathedral from the foundations. Their enthusiasm caught on. Teams of architects and workers of every description began to toil round the clock. Within two months and ten days the cathedral and the patriarchate were standing again and the collections for Jerusalem were taken up

once more. When Grigor went to Jerusalem (raising money on the way, but also building Armenian hostels in various cities), the debts had been paid, all objects placed as securities were freed, and sources of income were assured for the future. The patriarch proceeded to repair the old buildings and to build new ones in Jerusalem and elsewhere. He established a monastery in Jaffa which stands there with its Armenian priest to this day; he introduced order and discipline among the Brotherhood, punished the guilty and rewarded the virtuous.

Patriarch Grigor was now old beyond his age. There were rays of joy and peace on his face, though the chain had damaged his skin and he had to stoop under its weight. The catholicos of all Armenians, the patriarch of Constantinople, notables from all parts of the world wrote and begged him to remove it. Grigor felt that his mission was accomplished. He built a small chapel and placed the chain under one of the columns of its altar. That chain can be seen today among the treasures of the Armenian Monastery of the Saints Jameses of Jerusalem.

Great men are active for as long as the last measure of their energy is not consumed. Grigor was now so old that he had to be carried around occasionally in a stretcher. This did not prevent him from continuing to serve his people. The Greeks had produced false documents in Constantinople and laid claim to no less an Armenian property than the Armenian cathedral itself. The venerable patriarch undertook a voyage to Constantinople. The old boat on which he sailed filled with water on the way, but he arrived there. He won the case against the Greeks and returned. Then one day the Latins severely injured an Armenian vardapet because he had let his broom wander into the Latin section of a church while sweeping the area belonging to the Armenians. This created a need for skillful negotiations. Grigor spent the last years of his life trying to establish peace among the three most important churches of the Holy City: the Greek, the Armenian and the Latin, in that order.

He died in 1749. Without his efforts it is doubtful whether we would have had an Armenian patriarchate in Jerusalem, today.

Introduction to Story XXXI

Between Moses of Tathev (Story XXVIII) and Simeon of Yerevan there is a period of one hundred and twenty-five years and a succession of fourteen catholicoi. Simeon died in 1780. The eighteenth century was, for the West, a period of "enlightenment" and of emancipation. But it was a long time before the ideas that stirred Europe became popular among the Armenians. Of greater moment to them was the coming to power in Russia, in 1682, of Peter I, surnamed "the Great". Peter is known to history for his cruelty and ruthlessness, but also for his unusual administrative abilities and his determination to introduce European civilization into Russia. Perhaps the most important date of his career is 1709 when he defeated, at Poltava, the forces of Charles XII of Sweden. From then on Russia's power was undisputed; and since the subsequent czars and czarinas took upon themselves the politically expedient responsibility of protecting the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman empire, Russia was looked upon by the Christian Armenians, too, as a defender against Persian brutalities.

In the eighteenth century the situation of the Armenians was affected by the political destinies of Russia, the Ottoman empire and Persia. The Ottoman empire kept losing ground until, in 1774, it signed with Russia the humiliating treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji. Persia by now no longer had any effective central government and the several Persian khans governed their small domains as they pleased. The Armenians living to the east of the Ottoman empire and to the west of Russia were subjected to the barbarities of most, but not all, of these khans. There was, however, one region where the Armenians enjoyed self-rule in the beginning of the century: the mountains of Gharabagh, situated roughly between the rivers Kura and Araxes and extending westward as far as Lake Sevan. Here Armenian chiefs, known as "meliks", maintained their independence for a time,

but internal dissensions and the superior power of the Turkish army put an end to it. One famous man of Gharabagh, Israel Ori, was determined to gain independence for all of Armenia. His single-mindedness and ambition took him to Rome, to France where he served in the forces of Louis XIV, to England as a prisoner of war, to Germany and to Russia. Back in Armenia he tried in vain to persuade the Armenian ecclesiastical authorities to accept the pope's supremacy in exchange for a promised political freedom. He then turned to Peter I. The Russian emperor used him for his own ends to gather information about the Persian military potential. When Israel Ori died in 1711 he was a disappointed man. In view of his ambitions it is at least interesting that his name should be an anagram of "il sera roi" (he will be king).

Such were the political uncertainties and hardships imposed by foreign rule under which the Armenian catholicoi tried to govern the church. We can only review here some of the activities of some of the more prominent among them:

Philippos I of Al'bac reigned at a time (1633-1655) when Russia had not yet emerged as a power to be coped with, and therefore the pope was the man to look to for help against oppressors. A famous Latin missionary of Philippos' time is an Armenian-speaking monk, Padre Paolo Piromalli, welcomed by the catholicoi as a teacher of languages and of philosophy. His special technique consisted in teaching the Latin faith without using words such as "Chalcedon" which were unpalatable to the Armenians. Nevertheless he did make himself undesirable and the catholicoi turned to other sources for the education of the clergy. At that time the geographical limits of the jurisdiction of each catholicoi (Etchmiadzin, Siss and Al'thamar) were not clearly defined. Philippos wished to put an end to the disputes, and in 1651 the matter was settled at a meeting held in Jerusalem. This same council established rules regarding the consecration of bishops and forbade the remarriage of widowed priests. (This latter restriction was removed in 1923). Philippos is also responsible for the rebuilding of chapels for the Rhripsimian and Gayanian nuns.

During the reign of Hacob IV of Tchougha (1655-1680) Armenian books began to be printed in Amsterdam. (Censorship made it impossible to print non-Latin books in localities closer to Armenia). The first Armenian *Bible* was printed during the reign of Catholicoi Eliazar of Aintab (1682-1691) by Voscan Vardapet, who

was later obliged to move from Amsterdam because of a shortage of funds. He sent a copy of his Bible to Louis XIV expecting this king to grant him the right to reside in France to continue his work there but his hopes went unfulfilled. Voscan Vardapet also prepared in Latin the first statistics of the clergy of the Armenian church.

When Alexander I of Tchougha (1706-1714) ascended the throne of catholicos a considerable effort was still being made by the Latins to win over the Armenian church. The new catholicos pointed out in a letter to the pope that missionary work *was* according to the spirit of the Bible, but the proselytizing zeal of the Latin church should be spent on non-Christians. It was during the tenure of Alexander that the Armenian (Roman) Catholic patriarchate of Lebanon was founded by the four Mouratian brothers who were successful businessmen. They liquidated their affairs and used their money for the foundation of the Antonian monastery of which they became the first monks.

In 1724 Etchmiadzin was occupied once more by the Ottoman army and Simeon of Yerevan, the future catholicos, obtained tax exemption for the city from Sultan Ahmed III Ghazi. Catholicos Astwadzatour of Hamadan (1715-1725) seems to have had scientific interests for he died falling off a roof while studying an eclipse of the moon. His successor, Carapet I, was anointed in Constantinople during the patriarchate of Hovhanness Colot. This was erroneously interpreted by Simeon as an effort made by Colot to dominate the catholicos and he spoke some harsh and hasty words against the good patriarch. The next twenty years are marked in Armenia by the rise to power of Nadir Shah, the usurper of the Persian throne. He became a close friend of Catholicos Abraham III (1734-7) who once found himself in the uncomfortable position of being honored by Nadir at an affair where, among other activities, Armenian prisoners were being sold as slaves. Abraham "bought" as many of them as his financial means permitted and found less direct ways of freeing the rest.

When Hacob V, Simeon's immediate predecessor, ascended the see of catholicos in 1759, Etchmiadzin and Yerevan had passed back to Persia. Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter I and of Martha Skavronskaya, was the Russian empress. She permitted the few Armenian churches in Russia to remain open. All other churches, save the Orthodox, had been ordered closed.

DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS SIMEON OF YEREVAN)

Father Simeon was a prominent vardapet of the Armenian church in the middle of the eighteenth century. He had been the brightest student at the school of Etchmiadzin where he was engaged as a teacher immediately upon graduation. Then he had accompanied Bishop Harouthyoun, the envoy of the catholicos of all Armenians, to different Armenian colonies outside of the fatherland, including the large towns of India. At the death of Bishop Harouthune, and while still only a deacon, Father Simeon had himself become the envoy of the catholicos to India. People remembered that when he was only a boy the patriarch of Constantinople had been informed of his unusual intelligence and had invited him to come to the capital of the Ottoman empire to study for the priesthood there.

Father Simeon did eventually go to Constantinople, but only *after* his ordination. Though there were other teachers in the big city, a group of eager students preferred to gather about the new vardapet from Etchmiadzin who explained to them the works of ancient Greek and Armenian writers. After having remained a few years in Constantinople, Father Simeon went on to Jerusalem. He wanted so see for himself that other important center of the Armenian church.

From 1749 to 1752 the Armenian patriarch of Jerusalem was one of the better-known men of our history: his name was Archbishop Hacob Nalian. He had been the patriarch of Constantinople, and returned there again after he resigned from the see of Jerusalem. In the midst of all his feverish activities Archbishop Nalian wrote several books of lasting value, including a *Catechism* and a book on the *Prayers of Gregory of*

Narec. One day in Jerusalem Patriarch Nalian listened to a sermon preached by Simeon Vardapet. He, the master, was so impressed with what the young clergyman had to say and the way he said it, that he gave him his own ring, staff and phelonion. Father Simeon was forty-four years old when he went to Etchmiadzin and became a bishop.

Some years later when Bishop Simeon became Catholicos of All Armenians, all the people of the monastery of Etchmiadzin as well as those in charge of the estates belonging to it felt that they now were under a new, effective administration. It was like an old ship coming suddenly under the command of an energetic captain. However, Catholicos Simeon did not begin to exercise his full authority abroad until eight months after his election. Since there was no telegraphic communication at the time it took that long for the catholicos to receive the consent of the people of Constantinople, including that of Patriarch Nalian, to his election.

In the second half of the eighteenth century one of the most important centers of the Armenian church was Constantinople and it was altogether necessary that the influential Armenians living there give their consent to the choice of the head of the entire church. The Armenians of Constantinople owed their influence to three factors: first, they contributed financially to the Mother See; secondly, in addition to having the approval of the Persian ruler, the catholicos could not reign at that time without a firman (decree) from the sultan of the Ottoman empire. This was difficult, if not impossible, to obtain without the cooperation of certain notable Armenians of Constantinople; third, the patriarch of Constantinople was the head of all the Armenians living in the Ottoman empire, and there were far more Armenians in that land than elsewhere.

The first improvement that Catholicos Simeon introduced into the affairs of Etchmiadzin was something extremely simple but the neglect of which could become very serious. He kept an official, written record of his activities and copies of all official correspondence. It was not customary then to do what nearly

everyone does today in the more advanced countries of the world. There were no typewriters or carbon papers and to keep copies of correspondence required double work. Therefore people relied upon their memory and after a while things were either forgotten or remembered inaccurately. We know a great deal about the reign of Catholicos Simeon because he recorded what he did and kept copies of what he wrote to other people.

He also put together in a systematic way all the important documents already in Etchmiadzin, such as royal decrees, deeds and titles. Thus whenever he had a claim which others disputed, he could produce the document that proved his claim. In this way he established the ownership by Etchmiadzin of many lands of considerable value. To these he added new acquisitions. Then he proceeded to repair what was old and build what was needed. We may have an idea of the way in which the Brotherhood lived in those days when we look at some of his constructions. He built, for example, a wall around the monastery with watchtowers on four sides. This means of course that the monks of Etchmiadzin were never quite secure in their own dwellings. They were attacked by bandits, and the wall was designed to lessen the chances of plunder.

The situation would have been much worse had the catholicos not been a consummate diplomat and an indispensable negotiator between the khan of Yerevan, Hussein Ali, on one side and King Heracl of Georgia, on the other. Many a time King Heracl came to attack Hussein Ali, but war was averted through the efforts of Catholicos Simeon — except once, as we shall see. Again, the catholicos abolished the shopping centers that were close to the monastery and had new ones built farther away.

It goes without saying that all these building activities would not have been of much value without Simeon's efforts to raise the cultural and spiritual level of the people of the monastery and of the Armenian people by and large. To this end he first sought to convince everyone everywhere that the see of Etchmiadzin, once held by Saint Gregory the Enlightener himself, was the center of the Armenian church, and that no other see had

as much spiritual authority. Catholicos Simeon spent a good deal of his time, in the early years of his catholicate, to drive home the point that the interests of the Armenian church would not be served well if every important bishop behaved as if *he* were the head of the entire church. In doing this the catholicos was fighting against a very real menace. For quite some time, now, the political situation in Armenia had been so bad that nothing much could be accomplished in Etchmiadzin. People, when thinking of the Mother See, did so against the background of everlasting wars among Persians, Turks and Georgians. This had lowered the prestige of Etchmiadzin in the eyes of many. Against this way of looking at the Mother See the catholicos fought not just in words, but also in deeds. The Armenians of Russia, for example, were under the jurisdiction of the see of Al'thamar. He arranged with Empress Catherine II to place those Armenians under his own jurisdiction, and as long as the empress or her successors on the imperial throne were willing to help the Armenian church, the catholicos would pray officially for their welfare. He even composed a special service to that effect.

And then there was the old question of defending the Armenian church against the efforts of the Latins to dominate it. Catholicos Simeon was influential in persuading the French ambassador to the Ottoman empire to write to the abbots of the Latin monasteries requesting that they abstain from sending their missionaries among the Armenian faithful.

In 1775 the catholicos completed a book of very great significance: the *Tonatsouys* or Calendar of Feasts which allowed all the Armenian churches throughout the world to celebrate the same feasts on the same days. Since the dates of some feasts change from year to year, this had not been possible before. He raised to *five* the number of days in the course of a year dedicated to the Enlighteners. And in order to effect the lasting unity of the Armenian Church around the teachings of the Enlighteners he asked every bishop to promise to be always faithful to Etchmiadzin.

Catholicos Simeon established in Armenia the first printing house at a time when to most people such an enterprise seemed impossible. He even donated a printing machine to the Georgians. A wealthy Armenian of India with a long name: Gregory Michaelian Katchatchan Tchakigants, donated a paper mill and for the first time, in 1772, an Armenian book was published in Etchmiadzin on paper manufactured on the premises. Its title is: *Spiritual Recreation*.

Catholicos Simeon was now well advanced in years and one day he received the frightful news. King Heracl of Georgia had camped his army near Etchmiadzin and he was preparing to attack the Persian khan Hussein Ali. The latter had not been paying his tributes and the king was determined to punish him. All the efforts of the aged catholicos to prevent the war were futile. Heracl attacked in 1779. As the catholicos witnessed the ravages worked by Georgian and Persian soldiers in and around Etchmiadzin he felt as one who spends his life building a house and then sees it ruined by forces over which he has no control. He was stricken with grief and lived only one more year. But, contrary to what he may have thought, his work had not been in vain.

No Armenian catholicos of the eighteenth century is greater than Simeon. His greatest concern was to protect the Armenian church against error, for he believed that "her faith is perfect" and that "she is enough for salvation and to lead us to life eternal." We may remember Catholicos Simeon every time we sing *Der Voghormya* ("Lord Have Mercy") at the end of the Divine Liturgy, for he is the one who composed that moving chant.

Introduction to Story XXXII

The period of seventy-seven years that separates the death of Simeon of Yerevan from that of Nersess of Ashtarac (1857) is a period of important transitions in the history of the Armenian church. These transitions took place within a vast complex of military and diplomatic operations which the various European powers conducted in an attempt to solve what is known as *The Eastern Question*. The Question for the European powers—for Great Britain in particular—was to contain the increasingly ambitious Russian forces which were bent on controlling the Bosphorus, the Aegean, and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. And the most expedient way of realizing this objective was to keep the sultan in a strong enough position to oppose the czar, yet always dependent on British support. The world situation that was brought about by all these circumstances accounts for many of the developments within the Armenian church.

The most important development of the period is the extension of Russian domination over Yerevan and Etchmiadzin which had been, until 1828, under Persian control. The Armenians not only welcomed the Russians, but also helped them to defeat the Persians whose greedy and lawless rule had become altogether intolerable. As we shall see in the present story, one of the leaders of the Armenian liberators of Etchmiadzin was Bishop Nersess. His military activities may be favourably compared to those of the famous Greek archbishop, Germanos of Patras, who raised the standard of revolt against the Ottoman Turks in 1821.

The Armenians had been expecting the Russians for a long time. The Russian rulers themselves had counted on Armenian assistance. The Russian strategy consisted in occupying parts of the Persian-dominated territory in order to penetrate the Ottoman empire from the east. Catholicos L'oucas of Cariinn (1780-1799), the successor of Simeon, had urged Empress Catherine II to deliver the Armenians

from the Persian yoke. Yet he was cautious in his appraisal of her promises. He seems to have felt that nations have not been given their independence but have earned it.

Catholicos L'oucas died in 1799. It is altogether remarkable that in the midst of an almost hopeless political situation he had felt optimistic enough to have the inside walls of the cathedral of Etchmiadzin embellished with decorations and paintings. He had 120 canvasses made by an outstanding artist, Hovnathan Hovnathanian, a grandson of Naghash Hovnathan, an even more renowned artist and poet.

An important innovation during the reign of L'oucas was the adoption of an advisory council of no less than six bishops and archbishops. This led to the formation of a "governing council" during the reign of Catholicos Daniel of Surmari (1807-1808). This governing council was, in turn, the preliminary step toward the formation of a synod which lasted until the first decades of this century and was then replaced by the Supreme Spiritual Council. The catholicos himself appoints the members (clergy and lay) of this council.

Daniel was the teacher of Nersess of Ashtarak at the school of Etchmiadzin while the latter was yet a boy. Upon his graduation Nersess accompanied Daniel on various missions and a lasting friendship developed between them. The young vardapet was full of appreciation for the quiet dedication of his superior to the welfare of the church, and the archbishop perceived the extraordinary abilities of his assistant. In striking contrast to his small size Nersess gradually acquired a colossal stature: his person dominates the history of the Armenian church during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. He supported and often guided Daniel during the latter's lifetime.

Daniel's anointment as catholicos took place not, as customarily in the cathedral of Etchmiadzin but at Bagrevand, and while his predecessor David (1801-1807) was still in full control, because many of the higher clergymen and other monks of Etchmiadzin did not feel that David was truly dedicated to the welfare of the church. David had not been able to impose his will without the support of the Persian khan, and ironically enough it was this very khan who ultimately ordered his downfall.

Daniel occupied the throne at Etchmiadzin in 1807. A year earlier, on the 10th of July, he had issued his most famous encyclical

in which, with a likely allusion to David, he deplores the evils of autocratic rule and announces the formation of the aforementioned synod which will, he says, meet every day in a room in the center of which will be placed "the Holy Cross and the Gospel of Christ and the Book of Laws and the Canons of the Holy Fathers", so that decisions may be made and judgements pronounced accordingly. And in case there are no *problems*, the council will busy itself with projects designed "to brighten the despoiled Holy Mother See of Etchmiadzin and the Nation and Church of the Armenians." When Daniel's life, ridden with grief and physical sickness, came to an end in 1808 the usual confusion did not follow, for the senior member of the synod automatically assumed charge of the administration of the church until the election and anointment of a successor.

This successor was Ephrem of Tzoragel'. He was anointed on November 6, 1810. The fact that he was asked by Abbas Mirza, the crown prince of Persia, to take an oath of loyalty to the Persian government (or whatever was left of it) is an indication of the political uncertainties of the times and evidence of the fact that Armenian sympathies were far from being on the Persian side. Abbas Mirza was not himself an unjust man but his authority did not extend far enough to prevent the generally harmful activities of the Persians towards the Armenians. Nersess continued to dominate the scene because his appetite for work was such that he seemed to be everywhere and behind every decision. He had become the arachnord of Tbilisi when Ephrem went to Russia secretly (for the Persians would not have permitted such a trip) on a fund-raising mission; Ephrem was eventually obliged to resign. He was succeeded by Hovhanness of Carbi, Nersess' predecessor, during whose reign the Polozhenye was drawn up. The Polozhenye was a constitution which reserved to the czar the choice of one of the two candidates for catholicos to be presented by an Assembly composed mostly of clergymen. Its restrictive clauses were criticized by the Armenians of Constantinople and of India. It remained in effect until 1917.

The first American Protestant missionaries appeared among the Armenians in Jerusalem and Constantinople during the reigns of Ephrem (1809-1830) and Hovhanness (1831-1842). In 1830 the Ottoman sultan had at last, and under European pressure, allowed Armenian and other Roman Catholics to have a bishopric of their own in the capital.

WE SHALL NOT BORROW, HE SAID

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS NERSESS OF ASHTARAC)

On a happy day of the year 1770 the people of Ashtarac rejoiced when they heard that a son was born to Father Harouthune. Ashtarac was a little village at a distance of about thirteen miles northwest of Yerevan and Father Harouthyoun was its priest. The baby grew up to be an intelligent and active boy. He then entered the service of a bishop and eventually went to the school of Etchmiadzin. Upon graduation he became a deacon and then a celibate priest. In 1809 he was consecrated a bishop. Three years later an Anglican monk, Henry Martin, after a visit to the Mother See of the Armenian Church, wrote in his diary: "... this monastery or better still, the entire Armenian nation is subject to the authority of Nersess."

Henry Martin was not exaggerating. The new bishop's extraordinary capacity for work as well as his unusual intelligence and sterling character had made of him the most prominent Armenian man of his time. Consequently, when in 1814 he went to Tbilisi as the arachnord of that diocese, the people welcomed him with open arms. There a notable man about town, Prince Tarchi Behboutian, came into contact with him. Behboutian was under the impression that *he* could run the diocese as he pleased, for he had all the money he needed and all the important connections. As he beheld the small size of the new arachnord he was sure that he would have no difficulty in continuing to be, as it were, "the bishop behind the bishop". But before the superior competence of Bishop Nersess his illusion was shattered. It appeared that the arachnord, and not he, was the master.

What Bishop Nersess wished to achieve most of all was to found at Tbilisi an Armenian school. Etchmiadzin was then

under Persian control and under such rule it was impossible to run an institution of learning successfully. Here at Tbilisi the church owned many lots and the Russian government requested that buildings be constructed on them. Diocesan offices were built first; then shops which would be sources of income for the school. Then the school itself. The "Nersessian" is one of the more important schools that the Armenians have had in the course of their history. Without it, the talents of a number of our famous men would have been wasted away.

Many of the Armenians of the Russian towns, including Tbilisi, were industrialists and quite well to do. Some, such as the Lazarians, were fabulously wealthy. But even the common folk were safer and, on the whole, more comfortable than those who still lived under Persian rule across the frontier. In fact, the liberation of the Armenians of Persia was one of the main concerns of their compatriots in neighboring Russia.

The long-awaited opportunity came in 1826 when the czar's army made ready to march southward. The Russians were certain of the support and cooperation of the Armenians because they had promised them an autonomous state under Russian protection. They had, at one time, even gone so far as to speak of an independent Armenian kingdom. On the twenty-ninth of July Bishop Nersess issued a call to arms: "Let us die manfully for the sake of our brothers!" he quoted the Bible, "... oppose the enemy and his satellites, with the Russians or otherwise... and if necessary do not spare the last drop of your blood!" he exhorted them. And when the bishop himself mounted his horse to lead a contingent of volunteers, the men under his military command had to admit that he was one of the finest commanding officers they had ever seen.

1828 is an important date in the history of the Armenian church because it marks the beginning of a new period: from that year on, Etchmiadzin and Yerevan were no longer under Persian rule. Some eight years later the czar signed a document that is known as the *Polozhenye*. This was a constitution for

the Armenian church which said, among other things, that of two candidates presented by the Armenians for catholicos, the czar shall choose one according to his pleasure.

When the Polozhenye was being written Bishop Nersess was in Bessarabia, a strip of almost desolate land between Rumania and Russia. His removal there had been maneuvered by Paskiewitch, the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces of the Caucasus. Paskiewitch and Nersess could not see eye to eye because the Russian general wanted to give the Armenians as little autonomy as possible in every sphere, while the Armenian bishop kept reminding the Russians of all the promises they had so liberally made when Armenian support and assistance had been badly needed.

Bishop Nersess was kept in Bessarabia for fifteen years. Anyone else confined to such a place after so many services rendered to his church and to the Russian government would feel dejected and would spend his time speaking evil against his enemies. Bishop Nersess did protest, but he never sulked. On the contrary, as soon as he set foot in Kishinev, the administrative center of Bessarabia, he had a single objective: to make himself useful and to brighten up the drab life of the people. The fifteen years he spent there were so tightly packed with activity that at the end of that period no bishop would have minded going to Bessarabia. It had become an archbishopric, and cities as far away as Petersburg now came under the jurisdiction of that diocese.

When the then reigning catholicos, Hovhanness VIII of Carbi, died in 1842, there was only one archbishop whom all the Armenians everywhere wanted to see on the throne. Nersess was elected and in due time presented himself before the czar.

"I have had a very pleasant interview today; I thank you for being elected," said Nicholas I at the end of that interview on November 28, 1843. This was a very significant declaration. For years Paskiewitch and his associates had tried to discredit Nersess. Within half an hour the catholicos had won the trust

and sympathy of the czar who did not hesitate to express his regret for having been duped by his advisors.

While Nersess was still in Petersburg, the old capital of the Russian empire, the question of the relationship between the Russian and the Armenian churches arose. It would have been very convenient for Nersess to declare, for the sake of friendship, that there were no differences between the two churches. Some friends suggested, in fact, that he do so. But the catholicos insisted on the position of the Armenian faithful. He gave the historical background of their beliefs and asked the Russian authorities to remove from their books any unfavourable references to the church of which he was now the head.

It took Catholicos Nersess three years to reach Etchmiadzin; when he passed through a town it was like a royal parade; everybody turned out to see him and he was invited to the most sumptuous residences. But what detained him most of all were the many problems that he had to attend to in preparation for his work at the Mother See. The majestic ceremony of his anointment took place on June 9, 1846. Never before had that ceremony been performed with so much pomp and solemnity.

Then a long and painstaking program of improvement was begun. The first step was to see to it that each member of the monastery was in good health. One day as the catholicos, in his personal quarters, was about to be served his special food, he suddenly ordered an aide to fetch him from the refectory the meal served to the brothers. He tasted it to make sure that it was nourishing and well seasoned. He did this quite often, for he wanted the cooks to cook for the brothers as if they were cooking for the catholicos himself. No problem which had to do with the welfare of the Brotherhood was unworthy of his personal attention, and in return he demanded that the brothers attend to their religious duties and do their appointed work well.

On another occasion the catholicos received a letter from a very close friend who happened also to be very wealthy and very influential. He was a Lazarian and that was enough to make most people bow to him. He had already contributed very very

generously to the endless projects of the catholicos and could and was ready to contribute much more. In his letter he was asking for a favour, but the favour was against the law of the church. Wouldn't the catholicos be kind enough to grant an "exceptional" permission? The head of the church gave a simple answer proving once more his unshakable integrity: "the law," he wrote back, "is the same for all, whether wealthy or poor."

Catholicos Nersess had a boundless confidence in his people. In Petersburg some friends had suggested that he borrow 200,000 rubles from the imperial treasury to rebuild certain parts of Etchmiadzin. "We shall not borrow," he said, "because we trust in God and in the generosity of our own people." To the people he was forgiving and kind, and they responded to his call with enthusiasm. In a relatively short time Etchmiadzin had so improved as to be hardly recognizable. The catholicos had built a huge artificial lake: the purpose was to breed fish, to provide a place for recreation, and to irrigate an artificial forest of fruit trees and evergreens. There were stables, farms, sugar and milk factories. The accounts were regularized, and in order to discourage fraud the catholicos insisted that all movable and immovable properties of the members of the Brotherhood should be bequeathed not to relatives but to the monastery. The school was modernized and more competent teachers engaged.

As to his own needs, Catholicos Nersess was satisfied with very little: he was a frugal person and seldom ate meat. On the night of February 13, 1857, all he had was half a pomegranate sprinkled with sugar. That was to be his last meal. Towards morning, while it was still dark, he remembered that he had to write a letter to the Russian Ministry of the Interior about certain rights of the Armenian catholicoi. He was now 87 years old. He rose, lit the lamp, sat at his desk and began to write. He was halfway through when his heart stopped. They found him slumped in his chair, the pen in his pale hand, still wet with ink. It was a fitting way to die for a man who had been blessed with many talents and who sought to use them in the path of virtue for the welfare of his people and the glory of God.

Introduction to Story XXXIII

The twenty-five years that elapsed between the death of Nersess of Ashtarak (1857) and that of Georg IV constitute one of the crucial periods in the history of the Armenian church: many underlying social and religious problems came to the surface during that period and the actions that were taken then continue to affect directly the life of the Armenian church in our own day. Two sets of events, the one national and the other international, are of particular importance: the framing of the *National Constitution* and the treaties of San Stefano and of Berlin. We shall presently say a word about the National Constitution; the treaties will be dealt with in the introduction to Story XXXIV.

The Armenian National Constitution, prepared by a group of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople and then submitted to a General Assembly for approval, was approved in turn by Sultan Abdul Aziz in 1863. From that date on, therefore, it became law and regulated the internal affairs of the Armenian community of the Ottoman empire. Its legal original was of course written in Turkish and bore the title of *Nizamname* ("Rule" or "Procedure"). The Constitution in essence aimed at limiting the power of the patriarch of Constantinople and at having the Armenian nation governed by representatives of the people. The program also reduced the power of the *amiras*, the wealthy bankers to high Turkish officials, who kept their wealth within the family from father to son. The amiras constituted a sort of Armenian aristocracy and their power was due not only to their means (since certain businessmen could almost match them in that) but also to the fact that through their connections they could influence the decisions of the Porte and, consequently, those of the patriarch. The forces that brought about the preparation of that document and its approval by the sultan are as follows:

A.— New theories of government as well as theories of national-

ism and of secularism made their appearance in Europe and led to the French Revolution of 1789. Several Armenian students were in France when these ideas were gaining momentum in the first half of the 19th century. They imbibed them and upon their return to Constantinople were determined to try to effect similar changes among their compatriots.

B.— These students of European ideologies could succeed in implementing their program because of the relatively favourable atmosphere in Constantinople created by the advent, in 1839, of Abdul-Mejid on the Ottoman throne. The European powers which needed the alliance of the Ottoman empire saw that the only way to keep that moribund empire on its feet was by internal reform.

The National Constitution (*Azgayin Sahmanadrouthyoun*), inspired by eighteenth-century European ideas, was made possible in Constantinople because of the faint wind of liberalism that passed over the Ottoman empire during the reign of Abdul-Mejid and his successor Abdul-Aziz. Needless to say, this wind touched only the surface of things. The acts that followed within half a century, aimed at the elimination of the Armenians, are seldom matched in the annals of man's inhumanity to man.

In the middle of the 19th century (i.e. before the Constitution) the patriarch's authority had already been curtailed to some degree by two auxiliary councils. Some of the amiras, on the other hand, were very competent individuals and their devotion to their people was seldom surpassed, as in the case of Harouthyoun Pezjian who died in 1832. But a constitution was needed to put an end to a certain arbitrariness with which the more and more serious national problems were being solved. The Constitution was in fact the counterpart, for the Armenians of the Ottoman empire, of the Polozhenye that was in operation at Etchmiadzin; and there were basic differences of principle between the two documents: the most important of these was the preponderant participation of the laity in the affairs of the church at Constantinople. It is significant in this respect that Patriarch Sargis (Gouyoumjian) of Constantinople could become a patriarch *because* he was a supporter of the Constitutionalists; but he resigned in less than two years having turned against them in the meantime.

It is during Sargis' tenure that a historic controversy known as *Nersenn-Doursenn* ("Insiders vs. Outsiders") took place. The designa-

tion *Nersenacann* referred to those who, led by the Brotherhood of Jerusalem, insisted that the Armenian patriarch of Jerusalem should be “*nersenn*” (from the inside), that is, chosen from among those who were or had been monks of that monastery. The *Doursesenacans* led by the leaders of the Party of the Constitution were not willing to respect this provision, inasmuch as it was easier for them to control the Brotherhood and the treasury of Jerusalem by placing at its head a bishop who was “*doursesenn*” (from the outside), say, from Constantinople. The Brotherhood of Jerusalem came out victorious in the end.

A development that sheds light both on the controversy and on the Constitution itself is the convening in 1861 of some one hundred and fifty clergymen at Constantinople, with the patriarch presiding. This convention passed, among others, the following resolutions: (a) that the patriarch of Jerusalem shall be an “insider”; (b) that religious matters are decided according to, and on the basis of, canon law and not by plurality of votes; (c) that vardapets can also be elected to the see of patriarch; (d) that the clergymen assembled have a right to pass these resolutions.

Of the above resolutions the most important were (b) and (d), inasmuch as the Constitution had defined “power” as “plurality of votes”, and stipulated that the membership of the General Assembly and of all the councils—with the exception of the Religious Council—shall be composed in a way as to place that power in lay hands.

As far as our church and people are concerned, the nineteenth century can be characterized as the century of constitutions. We already spoke of the *Polozhenye*; the National Constitution occupied the very center of the history of the Armenian church in that period not only in itself, but also because many a clergyman was elected to, or dismissed from, a given office on the basis of his attitude toward the Constitution. Constitutions were drawn up for the patriarchate of Jerusalem and for the catholicate of Cilicia, and at least an effort was made, always in Constantinople, to draw up a Constitution for the entire Armenian church, i.e. valid both in the Ottoman and Russian empires. A draft of it was given to Catholicos Mattheos I (1858-1865), the immediate predecessor of Georg IV, while he was still in the capital waiting for a boat to take him to Etchmiadzin. Mattheos owed his election to the fact that he was at the same time “a man of the people” and a celebrated scholar in the field of Armenian studies.

A CATHOLICOS WHO LOVED MUSIC

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS KEVORK IV)

Brusa or Bursa, a city situated at a distance of about twenty-five miles from the southeastern shores of the sea of Marmara, was one of the more prosperous cities of the Ottoman empire. To this city went Kevork Vardapet in 1844 as the arachnord of that diocese. He was then thirty-one years old.

"He performs the Divine Liturgy beautifully," they said; and he did, because he had a cantor's voice and knew music well. But a good voice was far from being the only qualification that Kevork Vardapet had as a clergyman and as a church leader. He was the kind of man who knew how to get things done. That was the reason why the patriarch of Constantinople had engaged him as a secretary when he was still only seventeen. He had been ordained a priest at twenty-two and preached at that age from the bemas of the churches of the big city of Constantinople. Six years later he had been made the patriarch's vicar.

At Brusa one of Kevork's preoccupations was to have Armenian boys and girls speak Armenian. It required an effort at the time to do so because Turkish was, of course, the language of the land and the tendency was to speak the same language as everyone else. Kevork could not have any objection to his people's speaking Turkish in business and in their various dealings with the non-Armenian subjects of the empire. But he felt that every Armenian should know his mother tongue well enough to speak it with the other members of his or her family, and to read letters, newspapers and books in that tongue. There was an Armenian school at Brusa, but it was not very well organized; the teachers were not as competent as Kevork wanted them to be and therefore it was not very active. All these defects were corrected under the new vardapet's leadership. A thousand boys

and girls were enrolled and there was a noticeable increase in the use of the Armenian language within that Armenian community.

After four years of satisfactory service at Brusa Kevork Vardapet took the trip that he had been wanting to take for a long time. He went to Etchmiadzin, as a vardapet must, in order to become a bishop. The catholicos of all Armenians was then at Tbilisi, and when Kevork walked into the residence of the supreme head of the church, he was greeted with a fatherly warmth that he would never forget:

“Your soul and your wonderful achievements are known to me,” the catholicos said and he kept him at Tbilisi as his guest until June 22 on which day they went together to Etchmiadzin. Kevork was consecrated on July 11, 1848, and he returned to Brusa where he served ten more years. He then became the patriarch of Constantinople.

One year before Bishop Kevork’s election to the patriarchate something new had happened in the capital. The patriarch no longer ruled the community by himself as patriarchs had been doing for several centuries. The people wanted to have a share in the administration of their own community and although there were no large-scale elections, two or three councils were formed whose decisions the patriarch could not easily disregard. People also wanted to organize the works of charity as best they could and they set up a fund for the poor and for those who for one reason or another were left without shelter. The Armenians did something else which was a progressive step to take in those days: they opened a school of arts and crafts for girls. The patriarchate was responsible for the administration of this school.

All these councils, schools and works of charity required rules and regulations. Patriarch Kevork was sometimes enervated by all the details of his work, and being a born leader he wished he had as free a hand as his predecessors. But the times had changed, and he did his best to serve his people under the new conditions. He was not the sort of man who would encourage people to drop in and see him at all hours of the day. And while

he kept his distance from the people, he sought to establish a reputation for himself based on useful and lasting works. People remembered, for example, the zeal with which he had worked for the reconstruction of the city of Brusa following an earthquake in 1855, and a fire in 1863. At this latter date he had already resigned as patriarch and had returned to the city of which he had once been the bishop.

The representatives of the entire Armenian nation showed their confidence in and respect for Archbishop Kevork when they elected him Catholicos of All Armenians. It would be more proper to say that they elected him a *candidate*, for it was up to the czar to choose one of the two candidates for catholicos that were presented to him. Archbishop Kevork became catholicos when the czar's choice went to him as the favourite of the people.

Now when we look at the picture of a catholicos of all Armenians, we see a cross on his *vel'ar* or hood. No other Armenian clergyman has a right to wear a cross on his headgear and this is so from the time of Nersess of Ashtarac. Kevork IV in turn received his diamond-studded cross from Czar Alexander II.

The journey of Kevork IV to Etchmiadzin was marked by the usual succession of farewell and welcome programs, banquets, speeches, receptions (by Armenian notables and foreign officials), fireworks, and endless processions in every city, all of which would have been utterly forgotten—and his name would be remembered today only by a few specialists in the history of the Armenian church—had he not been the author of some lasting achievements.

All the Armenian schools of Russia were known at the time of Kevork IV as “spiritual schools”. This meant that as far as the Russian government was concerned their function was to teach the faith of the Armenian church and little else. But Catholicos Kevork wanted the Armenian schools to do more: he wanted other subjects to be taught so that their graduates might be better acquainted with the history, arts and literature of the Armenian people, and generally, be better prepared for life. Through his prestige and incessant efforts the catholicos obtained

an *ukaz* (edict) from the czar to the effect that the Armenians could decide on their own programs in their own schools and that they themselves should take care of the financial needs of their institutions of learning.

The greatest institution of learning to which Kevork IV devoted his attention was the one that he built at Etchmiadzin. The groundbreaking ceremony of that school took place in 1869, and the courses started on September 30, 1874. Its founder dedicated it to *Saint Kevork* (or George) but it came to be known by *his* name as the *Kevorkian jemaran* (lyceum). It was possible to receive a respectable education at the Kevorkian lyceum. Poor but bright students flocked there because no tuition was required. Though few graduates of that school became clergymen, the Armenians became a better educated people on account of it.

Catholicos Kevork found some of the money for all his projects in a clever way: there were many bequests that had gone unclaimed, many properties belonging to Etchmiadzin that were merely abandoned. The Armenian church owned some real estate, for example, in Amsterdam. The catholicos acquired the bequests and sold whatever properties he could not use. He spent the money not only for schools but also for various other projects such as a small museum. The printing house was, before Kevork's day, in a very poor condition. He provided it with the newest equipments and printed at Etchmiadzin a journal which he named *Ararat*. The purpose of the journal was to stimulate the life of the mind at the Mother See of the Armenian church, to educate the readers, and to inspire the writers to continue their research in their respective fields.

Catholicos Kevork always did things with an eye to the future. Thus after rebuilding the chapel of Saint Mesrop at Oshakan he set aside the feast of the Translators as Pilgrimage Day, and this is perhaps one of the most significant things he ever did. The Armenians went to the shrine of Saint Mesrop not merely as to the shrine of a saint, but of a saint who had given them their national language.

Many are the memories that Catholicos Kevork left behind him. We shall mention only one more.

The signs that enabled the Armenian monks of the first centuries of our church to read music are still with us, but we no longer know what they mean. There had been only one attempt before 1873 at *writing* Armenian music again: this was in 1834 and it had not been successful. Therefore the choirmasters of the Armenian church knew the tunes of the Divine Liturgy and of other chants not because they had read them on music sheets, but because they had heard them sung by their teachers. They had thus learned them by heart. Not all choirmasters had heard the same chants sung the same way, and inevitably some songs were more beautiful than others. In 1873 Catholicos Kevork ordered two men to come to Etchmiadzin from Constantinople: one, Carapet Bal'tatlian, knew the Armenian sharacans very well; he could sing them all from memory. The other, Nicholaus Thashjian, was a music scholar and could transcribe music according to European notation. They worked together under the supervision of the catholicos and shortly thereafter the best Armenian church music began to be printed at the printing house of Etchmiadzin. Then the Patarag was set to three and four voices. Today we have the Divine Liturgy sung as composed by Macar Ecmalian, Comitas Vardapet and others.

Kevork IV was very active in the first half of his reign. In the last years of his life he was seldom well and he rarely allowed anyone to see him. Only a few even knew about his illness. He died on December 6, 1882.

Introduction to Story XXXIV

From 1874 to 1884 the patriarch of Constantinople was Nersess Varzhapetian of Constantinople. It is owing mainly to his initiative that *The Armenian Question* became an international issue in 1878, on the occasion of the Treaty of San Stefano. The Armenian Question concerned the fate of the Armenians living in the Ottoman empire. During the second half of the nineteenth century the lot of the Armenians became more and more frightful until it ended in the massacres of 1895 and then in the tragedy of 1915. In these times of undiluted terror it was only natural that the leaders of the church should assume political functions.

The terms of the Treaty of San Stefano (a village now called Yesilkoy in northwestern Turkey), were dictated to the Ottoman empire by Russia at the end of a war between the two powers that had lasted less than a year. At that time acts of banditry and violence against the Armenians were already common occurrences in the Ottoman empire. Organized massacres had been carried out in the region of the Taurus and again, during the war, a series of atrocities had been perpetrated by irregular units of the Turkish militia. Consequently the Armenians sought to secure for themselves the most elementary human rights, namely safety, religious freedom and the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour. To this effect Article 16 was inserted in the Treaty of San Stefano at the insistence of Grand Duke Nicholas with the consent of Czar Alexander II. That article was designed to force "the Sublime Porte... to realize, without further delay, the ameliorations and reforms necessitated by local needs in the provinces inhabited by Armenians and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and the Kurds".

It is well known that the Treaty of San Stefano never went into effect because of British opposition to any scheme which would weaken the Ottoman empire. Through secret negotiations Prime

Minister Benjamin Disraeli succeeded in obtaining Cyprus from the Turks in exchange for his promise that Russian troops would be made to withdraw from the eastern sections of the Ottoman empire, *previous* to the implementation of said reforms. This was one of the principal reasons why the Congress of Berlin was convened. It began its work on June 13, 1878. Two clergymen and two laymen went to this congress to plead the Armenian cause; Bishop Khoren Narpey went there after a visit to Petersburg; he was joined in Berlin by the future catholicos Mertich Khrimian who had made a diplomatic tour of Vienna, London and Paris. The lay representatives were Minas Cheraz and Stephen Papazian. Patriarch Nersess Varzha-petian had been keeping in touch with the foreign embassies of Constantinople; he had been encouraged to present the Armenian case in Berlin by many high officials, including certain Turks.

Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano was changed and was introduced into the Treaty of Berlin as Article 61. The change, effected with British support, favored the Ottoman empire. The Porte promised to give periodic reports of its reforms to all the signatory powers. But then, as the Duke of Argyll noted eighteen years later in *Our Responsibilities for Turkey* (London, 1896), the safety of the Armenians became everybody's business in general and nobody's concern in particular. The day dreaded by the great Gladstone, Disraeli's opponent, had come: "I value our insular position", he had said, "but I dread the day when we shall be reduced to a moral insularity." Gladstone is one of the greatest friends that the Armenians have ever had. Seldom does one find such moral earnestness in a statesman. He often used all of his power to help the Armenians, along with the other oppressed peoples of the world. J. L. Hammond has said of him in his *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*: "In his great moments he could touch with his spell even the man of mean and shallow mind...; at such a moment the bitterest of his opponents could see 'the God within him light his face' ". But no one could cast a good spell on Abdul-Hamid II. He had vowed to paint the Bosphorus red with Armenian blood. Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin had spoken of "provinces inhabited by Armenians". The only way Abdul-Hamid knew of having no provinces inhabited by Armenians was to cut down the Armenians who inhabited these provinces. Besides being morally blind, Abdul-Hamid sought in an innocent people a scapegoat to justify the crumbling of his empire.

And because weakness breeds suspicion he misinterpreted legitimate Armenian requests as possible pretexts for European intervention. Then, as a French friend of the Armenians, Georges Clemenceau, noted in *Massacres of Armenia: Witnesses of Victims* (Paris, 1896): "It is, with a monotony that drives to despair, the recital of the same crimes, of the same horrors perpetrated by the same methods in identical conditions." During 1894, 1895 and 1896 nearly 110,000 Armenians were killed and some 40,000 died of hunger, epidemics and cold. Viewed from another perspective the massacres of the last decade of the nineteenth century are a tragically glorious page in the history of the Armenian church for, as N. and H. Buxton (*Travels and Politics in Armenia*, London, 1914), Edwin Pears (*Life of Abdul Hamid*, London, 1917) and others have noted, the Armenians could have saved their lives simply by accepting the Moslem faith. The number of those who succumbed to the temptation was negligible.

In these trying years (1894-1896) the patriarch of Constantinople was Mattheos Izmirlian. In his first formal speech as patriarch he reminded the sultan that his subjects had not only obligations but also certain rights. This was not the sort of declaration that would please Abdul-Hamid, and he made this clear at the earliest opportunity. Yet Izmirlian assumed his office with a measure of optimism because the Russian, British and French embassies had prepared a project for the reforms of the six "provinces inhabited by Armenians". It goes without saying that the project in the end came to naught. Armenian political parties were organized, and Izmirlian in his policy of relying on the European powers, cooperated with them; a personal enmity developed between him and the sultan. He was made to resign and was exiled to Jerusalem. In the meantime 10,000 Armenians were massacred in Constantinople itself as reprisal for certain organized efforts to force the European powers to take interest in the plight of the Armenians. Yet even in the midst of all this misery the church continued to do its work. In 1895 the seminary of Armash, reorganized some six years earlier, graduated its first class.

At Etchmiadzin Mertich Khrimian became Catholicos of All Armenians in 1892 succeeding Macar I of Theloud on the throne. A noteworthy work of the latter was the re-opening of several hundred Armenian schools in the Caucasus which had been closed by the Russian government.

“DEARLY BELOVED FATHER”

(THE STORY OF CATHOLICOS MCRTICH KHRIMIAN)

A quiet event occurred in the year 1840. It was of great significance as far as the Armenian people were concerned, but very few people knew about it then. For the first time in their history a novel was written, and it was written in their spoken language. The name of the novel is *Wounds of Armenia* and the name of its author is Khachatour Abovian. He was a sensitive artist. “How prophetic!” we say as we read his book now. Indeed the feelings and thoughts that he expressed in that book became more and more widespread as the years went by. A few decades after Abovian’s death his book became very popular; other people of talent began to write fiction, poetry and music at a rate that had never been known before. In the history of Armenian arts and literature the second half of the nineteenth century is a brilliant period, even though at this same time the Armenians were being persecuted by the Turks, Kurds and Circassians of the Ottoman empire.

Many of the Armenian writers of that period lived in Constantinople or in its suburbs, and anyone who was famous *there*, was famous everywhere among the Armenians. As a matter of fact, all of the Armenian inhabitants of the Ottoman empire were divided, in the minds of many, into two groups: those who lived in Polis (short for Constantinople) and those who lived outside of Polis. If you lived in a town other than the capital, it did not really matter *where* you lived. As far as the people of Polis were concerned, it was all the same. You were what they called a *gavaratsi* (“a provincial”) and they did not think much of you. The people of Polis knew little about the provinces; the people of the provinces knew even less about their compatriots of the capital. Some of the people of the capital were really

educated, but others *thought* they were educated merely because they lived in the same town; nearly everybody tried to appear as European as possible. The whole situation was very much the same as in France, itself divided into Paris and the rest of the country. Nothing was done in Paris, from literature to *savoir-vivre* that was not immediately copied in Polis. At any rate there was a large gap between the people of Polis and those of the *gavar* (i.e. the rest of the Ottoman empire).

Now one man did more than anyone else to bridge this gap: the Armenian people on the whole loved him so much that we know him to this day as Khrimian *Hayric*. He will always be remembered as the “dearly beloved father” of the Armenian people.

How could Khrimian Hayric bring together two groups of people so different in their ways of thinking and living? In the answer to this question lies the secret of his fame: he kept reminding the Armenian people that they owed love and respect to each other because their Christian religion teaches it and because they are all *one* great family. To have an education was a good thing, but character was equally important, and Khrimian Hayric wrote again and again about the good, clean life of the country.

Mertich Khrimian himself was born in the provincial town of Van in 1820. He was brought up by his uncle who taught him the art of weaving, but Mertich was more interested in reading than in weaving cloth. He was still a boy when it became quite clear to everyone that he was a profoundly religious person. He went to the monastery of Varag where he showed a great interest in ancient classical Armenian, and in that language he was able to read the Bible. Later he quoted the Bible constantly in his many writings and chose from it most of his examples whenever he wished to drive a point home.

Armenian was about the only language that Khrimian Hayric ever knew, but he knew it remarkably well. That did not, however, enable him to make a comfortable living in Constantinople where he came at the age of eighteen like many other young men

of his time. It was customary to come to Constantinople to escape from the poverty of the country. Khrimian's purpose was to receive a higher education, but he did not have enough money to go to school and could find no one to help him. He took a job with a shoemaker, while continuing to study by himself.

Before long he was teaching those with whom he came into contact through his work. His talents as a teacher were recognized, he was hired by an Armenian school and even became a private tutor in a wealthy family. He had made a little money before he returned to his native city. His father had died and though he was a younger son, his responsibilities to his family had increased. His mother and elder brother expected him to marry and settle down. He did marry Miss Sevikantz. They had a daughter whom they named Thagouhi. But settling down was a different matter. Mertich was a poet and his heart was in the church. He kept travelling and writing poetry; he went to Jerusalem, then to Constantinople and back again to Van. This time sorrow awaited him: his wife and child had both died. Mertich became a monk at the monastery of Varag and was ordained a priest at Al'thamar. He was now thirty-four years old.

Khrimian who was a popular writer became a popular preacher. He tried to inspire the monks of the monasteries of the country with a desire for progress and education. And when he returned to Constantinople once more he founded a periodical, *Eagle of Vaspouracan*, in which he wrote extensively about life in the provinces. In time Khrimian and this periodical became inseparable; a printing-press became part of his baggage and he carried it along from place to place.

We all know that learning requires effort, and so most people are not very eager to learn. They seek the easy way out and want to do no more than what they have always done. Some of the people Khrimian came across were of this type. They resented the machines that turned out printed pages; they wanted neither to write for, nor read them, and one way of keeping out machine and all was to keep out Father Khrimian himself. Once they hired Kurdish bandits to do away with him; another time they shot

bullets into a room where Khrimian was busy "working for the monastery." They kept doing this, a report says, from midnight till morning.

Father Khrimian believed in the exchange of ideas. Around 1855 he took advantage of his position as abbot of two monasteries to exchange monks between the two institutions. But the people he was dealing with felt differently: those of the same monastery were used to each other and did not want any new faces to appear in their midst. For these unhappy reasons Khrimian became an undesirable person and the very brothers whom he wanted to educate for the sake of the Armenian church accused him of sedition. "He is trying to urge the Armenian people to insurrection against the Ottoman government," they said. This was a lie, but the times were critical and the accusation was serious. Father Khrimian had to travel to Constantinople, to Jerusalem and back again several times to clear up the matter. The patriarchate of Constantinople intervened, the Brotherhood of the monastery of Glac promised obedience to Father Khrimian and the latter returned to the country expecting to have some peace at last.

But evil people are hard to subdue. It was not long before Khrimian found the doors of his own monastery closed against him and he became a wanderer. He had a number of good supporters, but these too were reduced to silence when he went away. He had gone to Etchmiadzin. He became a bishop there in 1868.

The good reputation of Bishop Khrimian was gradually increasing among enlightened people. He was better and better known as a hard worker, a self-educated man, a lover of his people, a thinker, a writer and a courageous fighter against the instruments of the devil. In 1869 Khrimian became the patriarch of Constantinople. In spite of all the obstacles that had been raised against him by the people of his native country Khrimian used his new authority to try to improve their condition as much as possible. He could have punished his former opponents. He did not. In fact, he almost resented his title as Patriarch of *Con-*

stantinople and he made it quite clear that he was actually the patriarch of all the Armenians of the empire.

Many Armenian boys learn from their parents at least one story about Khrimian Hayric:

He had already resigned as patriarch when the representatives of the great nations of the world, Russia, France, England, etc. had gathered in Berlin in 1878 to decide on certain weighty matters affecting the Western world. There was there an Armenian delegation which was trying to have the European nations exercise pressure on the Ottoman sultan so as to put an end to the unbearable life of the Armenians in the empire. The Armenian delegation, of which Khrimian Hayric was a member, was not very successful. As he returned from Berlin, the people asked him why they had failed. Well, the archbishop said, to get what you want from an international congress is like eating harissah out of a common plate. We could not eat any because our spoons were made not of steel, but of paper . . .

Khrimian Hayric became the catholicos of all Armenians in 1892. The highest office in the Armenian church was, as it were, a gift of the Armenian people to him expressing their profound appreciation of his services and of the kind of man he was: wise and loving. Yet Khrimian Hayric knew when to be hard and unyielding. The occasion arose when the Russian government tried to take away the autonomy of the Mother See of the Armenian church and to extend its own control over it by confiscating all the properties of the see, including the cathedral. The catholicos resisted this Russian move with all his energy, which was still plentiful despite his advanced age. The crisis passed, and the problem was resolved in favour of the Armenian church.

The beloved catholicos died in 1907. In certain textbooks there is a picture of Khrimian Hayric sitting on the ground and leaning against an oak tree. The caption reads: "Two oak trees leaning against each other". We always think of Khrimian Hayric as of a tree in the country: solid in wisdom, solid in his devotion to his church, solid in his love for his people.

Introduction to Story XXXV

Within two years of Khrimian's death in 1907 Abdul-Hamid was deposed, but the racist wing of the "Young Turks"—who, with Armenian help, did away with the corrupt monarchy—itself turned against the Armenians in 1915. The systematic extermination of the Armenians began in April with the killing of their prominent clergymen and intellectuals. Thousands upon thousands, ostensibly driven into the interior of the land, were violated, robbed and killed on the way. More than one million Armenians were assassinated and an even greater number were affected by the pogroms in one disastrous way or another. Many thousands tried to find refuge in Russian Armenia. Here the situation was comparatively better, but the ravages of recent persecutions were still to be seen. A policy of russification had been adopted in the days of Alexander III whose aim had been to create a vast, monolithic, Russian Orthodox state.

In 1911 Catholicos Georg V of Tbilisi ascended the throne succeeding Mattheos II of Constantinople (Izmirlian) whom we mentioned in the introduction to our previous story. The latter had succeeded Khrimian Hayric in 1908.

Georg V, surnamed "the Grief-stricken", held the helm of the Armenian church through the persecutions of 1915 and the miseries of the First World War. It was during his reign that the Allied victories on one hand and the Communist Revolution on the other created in the Caucasus what may be termed a big-power vacuum which contributed to the proclamation by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation of an Armenian Republic in 1918, after a series of military engagements. But the Turks resumed the war in 1920 and occupied Alexandropol (Leninakan) on November 7. Twenty-two days later the Communists took over. That was the beginning of the present Armenian S.S.R. where Etchmiadzin is located. Needless to say, all these circumstances were far from creating the best of atmospheres for the growth and progress of the Armenian church.

In 1932 seventy-two delegates (seven of them from outside the Soviet territories) elected Khoren I to succeed Georg V. When, nine years later (i.e. during the Second World War), the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly convened at Etchmiadzin to elect a successor to the late Khoren I, it could not do so because a sufficient number of bishops and delegates could not be present. But on June 16, 1945, the Assembly reconvened and elected Georg VI, the former locum-tenens. It is a noteworthy circumstance that this meeting was presided over by the then catholicos of Cilicia, Garegin Hovsepian who, besides being an outstanding clergyman of the Armenian church, was also an outstanding scholar. But the significance of his presidency over the Assembly exceeded the limits of his personal worth. It meant that a feud, half a millennium old, between the sees of Etchmiadzin and of Cilicia had come to an end. Yet the friendship hardly outlived Catholicos Garegin himself. In 1956 the rift between the two sees was reopened as wide as ever when elements opposed to Etchmiadzin on political grounds elevated Bishop Zareh Payaslian to the throne of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon. His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians (elected on September 30, and anointed as successor to Georg VI on October 2, 1955), made a special journey to Antelias to repair the rift, define the respective jurisdictions of the two sees, and generally use his good offices for the election of a Cilician catholicos who would be acceptable to all the Armenians of Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus. His efforts proved fruitless. In the calendar that the Mother See issues yearly Archbishop Khat Achabahian has been listed as Locum tenens of the See of Cilicia.

The events in Antelias only accentuated a schism that had been in existence in the Armenian Diocese of North America since 1933. In that year the same political forces that were to be at play at Antelias twenty-three years later, brought about the murder of Archbishop L'evond Dourian. He was the arachnord of the diocese, loyal to the Mother See. The crime was committed at the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross (New York) while he was following a procession at the start of the Divine Liturgy in his full episcopal vestments as celebrant.

There has always been a tension among the Armenians of the United States (as elsewhere and among other peoples) between

those who have wished the ecclesiastical authorities to adopt a political program and those who have insisted on "keeping politics out of the church". The first Armenian clergyman ever to set foot on Armerican soil, Hovsep Dz. Vardapet Sarajian, forbade a political party to place its newspapers on the tables in the basement of the church shortly after it was built in Worcester. Sarajian later became a bishop and the first arachnord (1898-1906) of the Armenian Diocese of America. The next arachnord, Archbishop Yeznic Apahouni, arrived in this country on August 1, 1908, and resigned on September 7 of the same year. Quarreling factions made it impossible for him to hold a Delegates' Assembly and a speech he made at Carnegie Hall was unpalatable to many. Arsenn Dz. Vardapet Vehouni (1913-1917) refused to cooperate with the Armenian National Union of Defense on the ground that the diocesan authorities should not be led about by political interests. Archbishop Garegin Hovsepian (1939-1944) was sent by the Mother See and arrived in the United States in 1936 for the express purpose of healing the wounds inflicted upon the diocese in 1933. During the tenure of Tiran Vardapet (later Archbishop) Nersoyan (1944-1954) the Diocesan Assembly in its fifty-fourth session (1952) at Bridgeport, Connecticut, passed a resolution containing this passage: "We reaffirm the fact and our belief that the Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians . . . represents only the spiritual and ecclesiastical authority of the Church; and that under the canons of our Church, he does not have or exercise political authority over his flock; and that he has repeatedly exhorted his people through his encyclicals to be loyal to the respective countries in which they live and of which they are the citizens."

During the tenures of the arachnords mentioned as well as during those of Archbishop Tirayr Hovhanessian (1921-1928) and Archbishop Mampre Calfayan (1954-1958); also during the intervals when such clergymen as Babkenn Gulessserian (later Catholicos of Cilicia) and Shahé Gasparian (later Dean of the Seminary of Antelias) were locum tenentes, the history of the diocese has been a difficult climb towards the achievements to be seen today. This work is being continued under Archbishop Sion Manoogian, the present arachnord, elected unanimously in 1958 by the General Assembly at the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs, Long Island, New York, and re-elected in 1962.

OUR DIOCESE

(THE STORY OF THE FIRST ARMENIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES)

If an Armenian man of the last decades of the nineteenth century had ambition or a spirit of adventure, and if he loved freedom, any boat was good enough if it carried him to the United States of America. Individual Armenians had come here prior to 1880, and some had served as soldiers and doctors during the Civil War. But beginning in that year they came in increasingly great numbers.

Life in this country was difficult at first: they did not know the language, they missed the folks back home and had to work hard. Yet they did not mind the hardships as long as they could save a little money. They sent home most of what they could save and were glad in the knowledge that their families could buy bread, perhaps a little meat and some milk for the children. They were glad to send the money for the rent of a shelter. They also sent clothes, but not the dresses and other apparel they admired in the windows of fashionable shops.

The first Armenian settlers came of course to New York and for many years Boston was as far out as they ventured. As is natural for men in unfamiliar surroundings they wanted to stay close together. Those who had come earlier went out of their way to find jobs for those who came after them. It was easier for a man to find a job for a friend in the factory where he himself worked, and so in some factories Armenian became almost a common language. Then there was the difficult question of finding, not a home—who could afford that?—but a room to live in. Even a single room in an apartment was too costly for one person. In the cheapest section of the town several young men lived together. They could not eat the food in the restaurants, either

because it was expensive or because they did not like it. They hired a newcomer as a cook and paid him a dollar a month each. This was his salary and out of it he had to buy the groceries.

Though many succeeded and some did not, everyone's aim was to excel. They were profoundly grateful for the many opportunities that America provided free of charge. They went to school, for they wanted to read and write the language of the country. Some left the factory and started businesses of their own. Younger men devoted themselves to one profession or another. In the meantime many went back to their native lands: some, to fight for the freedom of their compatriots; others to take Armenian wives; and it is difficult to tell whether the former or the latter went with fonder expectations. But those who could return, returned. They returned to the freedom and opportunities that America alone could offer.

From the first day of their arrival the Armenians knew that the *one* thing they could not do without was their church. Those who could sing passably well took out of their baggage the small Books of Hours that they had brought along, and did a little rehearsing. Then all the Armenians of the same town pooled their moneys and hired a hall for Sunday morning services. There, former choristers and deacons would step forward to say the *Hayr Mer*, the Creed, and to sing such religious songs as *Aravod Louzzo*. Many in the congregation could follow them and they did; and sometimes, though they lacked a pleasant voice, so profound was their yearning, that they sang louder than the leaders.

Perhaps a handful among them knew precisely what a layman was and was not allowed to do in a religious service, but they all knew very well that as long as they remained without a priest they would never hear the Patarag. They longed for the Armenian Divine Liturgy as they had not longed for anything else. The more than 300 Armenians of Worcester wrote a petition to the patriarch of Constantinople asking him to send them a celibate priest familiar, as they said, with the English, or at least the French language.

In July 1889 the very first Armenian priest set foot on American soil. His name was Hovsep Dzayragouyn Vardapet Sarajian. He was a former monk of the Armenian Monastery of Jerusalem and was sent here by Patriarch Khoren of Constantinople, for the Armenians of America were then under the jurisdiction of that patriarchate. Hovsep Vardapet went to Worcester. The news spread in all the towns of New England and the day so anxiously awaited came at last.

On July 28, 1889, the first Armenian Divine Liturgy was celebrated on the American continent. The faithful came out of the church, their hearts filled with joy; how much happier they would be, they thought, if they could participate in their own Divine Liturgy, in a church of their own!

The big question was that of money. The Armenians of Worcester did something which would be hard to imagine today, although they had to do it at the time: they asked the Armenians of Europe to send *them* money. From such cities as Manchester, London and Paris they received eight hundred and thirty dollars, some of which was used for the church. They also asked the Mother See at Etchmiadzin and the patriarchate of Constantinople to contribute. They received encyclicals of blessing. The patriarch and the catholicoi were not in a position to send any money anywhere. In time twenty-three American cities, other than Worcester itself, contributed to the building of the church in that city. Its construction was completed in January 1891 and it was named *Sourb Purkich*. This was an appropriate name for the first Armenian church built in this country. Those of the old country who had been saved from persecutions were dedicating their church in this new country to the Holy Saviour.

Hovsep Dzayragouyn Vardapet Sarajian did not stay long in this country. Being the only Armenian clergyman in the United States at the time, he had to travel constantly from city to city, although the cities he visited were not too distant from each other. Nor did the people make his life very pleasant for him. He left the United States in 1893 without any intention of re-

turning. He did not know, then, that he was going to be the first arachnord of the *Armenian Diocese of America*.

No sooner had Father Hovsep left than the Armenians realized once more how empty their life was without a priest and without the Divine Liturgy. Other priests came to the United States, but the people of Worcester now remembered with regret their first priest. Father Hovsep had, in the meantime, been consecrated a bishop by Catholicos Mertich of All Armenians. The catholicos sent the new bishop back to the United States with an encyclical which contained this exhortation: ". . . listen to the voice of your brave shepherd, follow in his steps, do his good will and keep his counsels."

Seldom, if ever, has a good religious leader been lucky enough to be heard by all the people. Bishop Sarajian had to work under trying conditions. Even then he served the diocese for eight years. In June 1901 he held the first Armenian Clergymen's Conference in this country. Four vardapets, one of whom had returned to the Armenian church from the Roman Catholic church, were present. An *ourarakir* (that is, a chorister who has a right to wear a stole) also attended.

Confusion followed the resignation of Bishop Sarajian in 1908. It was not until 1913 that another competent clergyman took over the administration and leadership of the diocese. Arsenn Dzayragouyn Vardapet Vehouni gave, in 1914, a report of his year's activities to the Delegates' Assembly in Worcester. At this assembly he made seven very concrete and very intelligent proposals. Almost all of them have been carried out, not during his tenure, but through the years. One of these proposals might, perhaps, have been carried out in his time, but it would now be very difficult, if not impossible, to do so: the proposal was to take a census and to know the exact number of Armenians in the United States. Another proposal that Arsenn Dz. Vardapet made is still to be carried out: we must, he said, have regular sources of income and not depend only on dues and gifts for our annual expenses. The other proposals are the following: 1) to have discipline in the diocese; 2) to have a constitution

filed with the state and be recognized as a corporation; 3) to have adequately staffed diocesan offices; 4) to have at least two priests who will not belong to any parish, but will go from one community to another to preach; 5) to publish an official journal. The Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America has accomplished all of these and more. It has also kept growing in size. The approximate number of Armenians in this country is 250,000. In 1927 California became a separate diocese. Its first arachnord was Bishop Garegin Khatchatourian. The twin Armenian dioceses of North America had the unprecedeted opportunity of greeting in 1960 His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians. He was the first catholicos to visit America. He promised to return to dedicate the Armenian Cathedral and Cultural Center, work for which is now in progress. They are to be built in New York, on Second Avenue, between Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Streets.

The head of the diocese is the Arachnord (Primate) who is elected by the Diocesan Assembly for a term of four years, the delegates to this assembly being themselves elected by the people of the different parishes; the priests of the parishes and other clergymen who hold various positions in the diocese also participate in the Diocesan Assembly. No other diocesan body has higher authority in matters of administration.

The Diocesan Council is elected by the Diocesan Assembly and is composed of four clergymen and five laymen. The diocese has over forty parishes, but not enough clergymen for all of them. The Saint Nersess Theological School was founded in 1962 to fill that need in the course of time.

The diocese publishes two journals, one in Armenian, the other in English. The arachnord is the president of various organizations including the Council for Religious Education which supervises church schools where nearly five hundred teachers teach about four thousand pupils every Sunday during the school year. These children will grow up and carry on the work of their diocese. They will serve their beloved Armenian church; and serving their church, they will be serving God.

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